Osvaldo Bayer

Anarchism and Violence

Severino Di Giovanni in Argentina 1923–1931

Contents

Introduction

The book we are presenting here is an interesting attempt by Osvaldo Bayer to reconstruct the activities of the Italian anarchist Severino Di Giovanni in Argentina in the 1920's. It also bears all the consequences of such a difficult task undertaken with the thorough but limited tools of the journalist.

The figure of Di Giovanni has always highlighted a profound division within the anarchist movement, which goes far beyond the boundaries of the specific events in his lifetime. From well before the period of his activity, right up to the present day, there have always been comrades who include the methods of direct action, armed struggle and expropriation in the struggle against exploitation. On the other hand there have always been those who are against these methods, in favour of propaganda and libertarian educationism alone. The latter is the position that was held by the anarchists involved in the anarchist daily *La Protesta* in Di Giovanni's time. Today there are still many who hold this position and who would no doubt have preferred us to have left Di Giovanni and what he represents in relative obscurity.

As it stands, this book contains certain defects which need to be pointed out and which we shall examine further on. Bayer's work, however, is an honest and objective attempt far removed from the stereotypes so dear to the bourgeois press. Contemporary accounts of his activities filled columns and columns about Di Giovanni, painting him as a bomb-thrower, bandit and assassin.

Not only the yellow press, but also areas from which one would expect better have insisted on seeing Di Giovanni both detached from the brutal and homicidal reality in which he lived and carried on his struggle, and detached from the anarchist movement of which he was a part.

For example the author to the preface of the Spanish edition of this book, José Luis Moreno, states, "Di Giovanni wanted from violence what the bourgeoisie wanted from law: an instrument to obtain a final aim which, naturally in both cases, were different and antagonistic. Di Giovanni believed he could fight the bourgeoisie with their own weapons". And further on, ". . . he used his arsenal of war like a basic instrument, relegating ideological problems to second place. For him, as for many anarchists, that is what 'direct action' meant". And again, "In reality he was a romantic. Paradoxical as it might seem, and quoting Bayer, we would say he was a romantic of violence. Love and Violence are real ends: and for him there were no others".

It might be difficult at first glance to draw a distinction between the proletarian violence of defence and the oppressive and terroristic violence of the State. But this distinction can and must be made. In attacking institutions arms in hand, Di Giovanni was not using the same weapons as the bourgeoisie, but the quite

different ones of liberation and popular vindication. And wherever did the author of the preface read that Di Giovanni put ideological problems in second place? Perhaps he could have done better in Di Giovanni's place, hunted and followed by the police like a wild animal, but still bringing out numerous anarchist publications, including a fortnightly paper *Culmine*, and an edition of Reclus' work? And finally, why define him a romantic? When we well know that today bourgeois historiography links this term to the decadent aspects of romantic poetics, those out of touch with or turning away from reality? To use this term today can only confuse the reader. There existed for Di Giovanni far more than Love and Violence: the struggle against fascism, the trade union struggle, the struggle for a new society—the struggle for anarchy. All were undertaken in full awareness of the need to use dangerous means, means which were justified only by the open war declared by those in power.

To return to the book. As We have said, it is an objective reconstruction far from the sensationalism of Di Giovanni's time. The development of Di Giovanni's activity has been followed attentively, through consulting contemporary newspapers, documents and testimonies. From the events at the Colón Theatre to the final moment in the face of the firing squad, we encounter Di Giovanni through a mixture of distance and sympathy. Not having had access to the sources used, we can only accept the conclusions reached by the historian, and consider his work to be positive. It is other aspects of the book that give us cause for concern, particularly the frequent recourse to value judgements all linked to a 'romantic and idealist' vision of Di Giovanni's revolutionary activity.

It is not our intention to deprive the reader of the pleasure of reading the rich narrative which Bayer supplies, so we will not attempt to go over Di Giovanni's activity here. We do however feel it is necessary to attempt to indicate the lack of foundation to Bayer's theoretical conclusions.

For example, he writes, "As a self-taught man, Di Giovanni believed in theory implicitly. And in his tragic naivete he believed that theory was made to be applied. If Bakunin or Kropotkin stated that, for the revolution and the achievement of freedom, all means are legitimate, Di Giovanni would use these means." (page 37)

It is in such passages that we realize that Bayer, although a conscientious researcher, has either not read, or has not understood anything of anarchist thought. Wherever did he find the statement that "Bakunin and Kropotkin say that all means are justifiable?" Where did he read that to use anarchist theory acritically is typical of the selftaught? Where did he learn that anarchist theory is theory made only to remain on paper? Di Giovanni was a coherent man. It is not true that any means were good in his opinion. He always chose means in relation to the terroristic violence of the structures of power, and he stayed on this road to the end. To ask oneself, as our author does, the psychology of his relationship

to anarchist theory does not make sense. *Face to Face with the Enemy*, Galleani's famous volume, and also the title of a section of Di Giovanni's paper *Culmine*, clearly shows the true substance of the relationship between theory and praxis. Di Giovanni knew that the attack against oppression had to use certain means, but he also knew that the other means—anarchist propaganda and publications—were of great value because they serve to prepare the field for active revolutionary intervention. But for this exchange between theory and praxis to come about, the first had to be developed in a certain direction, not become an obstacle in the path of direct action as in the case of the *La Protesta* editors.

Another interesting interpretation of Di Giovanni that Bayer makes is to identify him with Nietzschean individualism. This is an interesting problem. Bayer mentions the German philosopher's presence in Di Giovanni's thinking more than once. In fact his influence cannot be denied. Bayer tells us, "Noticable in Di Giovanni was the pronounced influence of Nietzsche (in searching through his library in Burzaco, police were to discover printed posters displayed on the walls and bearing quotations from the author of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*)." (page 113), and in a letter of October 22 1928, Di Giovanni himself writes, "Oh, how many are the problems that crop up along the pathway of my young life, beset by thousands of winds of evil. Even so, the angel in my head has told me so very many times that only in evil is there life. And I live my life to the full. The sense of my existence has been lost in that . . . in that evil? Evil makes me love the purist of angels. Do I perhaps do evil? But is that my guide? In evil lies the highest affirmation of life. And by being evil, am I mistaken? Oh, problem from the unknown, why do you defy solution?" From this Bayer concludes, "That tenderness turned to ruthlessness later when action was called for. Apparently he was a wholly impulsive man who surrendered fully to his emotions and behaved as if intoxicated by the whole gamut of colours, struggles, contradictions, beauties, generosities and betrayals that life has to offer, which is to say that he is a true Nietzschean."(page 56)

Reading Nietzsche certainly makes an impact on many, and probably did so on Di Giovanni. But to go on from this to define the man and his actions as Nietzschean seems too great a step. Even the presence of some phrases from Nietzsche's works in our comrade's library seems too modest an element to justify the claim that he was a dedicated follower of the philosopher's doctrines. This is a very serious problem and one which affects all the actions of an anarchism that insists on direct action and, while not denying the importance and value of propaganda and education, accentuates the importance of the attack against oppression.

It is not true that Di Giovanni "acted as though intoxicated by the whole gamut of colours, struggles, contradictions (. . .)". The fullness of his conception of

life had nothing of the improvised violence which confuses itself with the vital force in Nietzsche's philosophical dimension. We must not forget the German philosopher's vision of the essence of the world and of history, nor his admiration for the ideal of the 'superman'. In Nietzsche the deterministic element of the eternal return interacts with the voluntaristic and mystical element of the will to power. These opposing tendencies make the philosopher say interesting things about nationalism, religion and war; but also absurd and dangerous affirmations which in the mouths of the followers of national socialism, have wrongly made him a 'rightwing' philosopher. The reading of Nietzsche, as of Stirner, is quite a difficult task and it has nearly always been done badly. But there exists a clear division between Di Giovanni's reading of Nietzsche and his revolutionary anarchist activity. The voluntaristic aspect of his activity never aimed at creating a myth or of tracing the model of the 'superman'. He always bore in mind a precise situation of struggle, one which emerged from class exploitation and fascist oppression. This situation was continually being verified on a theoretical level in his paper *Culmine*.

One should not be misled by the flowery and overflowing prose that was once quite common among libertarian writers of the time (Galleani is one example). When he says that "only in evil is there life", the literary reference relates directly to a contradiction that is quite evident in a man who has chosen the road of the 'outsider'. If the bourgeois dimension of life is what everyone defines 'good', then only in 'evil' is there true life, only in breaking the circle of hypocrisy and false love of good is it possible to find a different, more essential good, the only one capable of founding the society of tomorrow through the pain and suffering of today. Even in his relationship with the very young comrade Josefina is he aware that, from the bourgeois point of view, his action could be condemned and considered evil: but what if it is precisely this evil that makes him feel he is right and affirming life? Then there is nothing left to do than to put words aside, look reality in the face, and act.

And so we come to the third problem which emerges from reading this book: that of terrorism. Once again Bayer gives way to value judgements and loses himself in absurd, unfounded statements: "Di Giovanni was an illstarred hero, a young man who took seriously everything which the texts of his ideology told him. That ideology, as he interpreted it, can shift from goodness and respect for human life in every circumstance, to the most desperate and violent action explained away by an ideal that seeks to secure absolute liberty for all."(page 228). It is therefore indispensable that the reader bear in mind Bayer's absolute lack of understanding as to what anarchism is and what, in fact, Di Giovanni's actions mean.

But our problem is a little different. Along with his comrades, Di Giovanni carried out actions which are normally defined 'terrorist'. He himself wrote, "In the eternal struggle against the State and its props, the anarchist who is fully alive to his function and his rebelliousness which arise out of the ideal which he professes and out of his conception of action, cannot very often foresee that the avalanche which he will shortly bring tumbling down the hillside will trap his neighbour's tail . . . this neighbour who is absorbed in contemplation of the heavens." (page 65)

First of all it needs to be said clearly what terrorism is. State propaganda by the usual servants in the pay of the bourgeois press has always described as terrorism actions by individuals or groups against those responsible for exploitation, against property, State institutions and constituted order. The other terrorism, the real terrorism carried out by the State directly using the army in war, or by the bosses at the workplace, has never been considered terrorism. The thousands of workers killed or maimed every year in this country alone. The poisoned sweets, hallucinogenic gases, defoliants and every kind of bacteriological arm perfected in Vietnam, now the patrimony of all the warmongering States. In Di Giovanni's time the favourite sport of the Argentinian bourgeoisie was 'hunting' in the Tierra del Fuego, during which the natives of the forests were shot dead. The same people who shot those 'savages' in cold blood for the pleasure of the hunt, were the most vigorous in condemning Di Giovanni's actions. Evidently when terrorism is practised against others it does not disturb the delicate palate of the bourgeoisie. But when the threat of it appears near to home, then their opinion changes.

It is right therefore that when we speak of repressive violence that we should speak of terrorism, but when speaking of the violence of the exploited in their own defence, the use of the term becomes the cause of misunderstanding and long, pointless discussions.

And Di Giovanni's actions were never violent for the sake of it. They were never indiscriminately applied to create a tension that would only favour power and its politics of consolidation. Di Giovanni's actions were always guided by a precise revolutionary reasoning: to strike the centres of power with punitive actions that find their justification in the State's violence, and which were aimed at pushing the mass towards a revolutionary objective. Di Giovanni always took account of the situation of the mass, even though he was often accused of not having done so. He was also accused of having contributed to the repression unleashed against the anarchist movement. In fact such an accusation is not possible. Police repression only kills a revolutionary movement if it is already dead in its most essential component, the attack against power. In other words, if a revolutionary movement in a social democratic situation deludes itself that it exists only because

it vegetates in the shadow of governmental tolerance, it is logical that a wave of repression will always end up destroying it. But in fact this repression only kills a lifeless corpse, one that deluded itself that it was alive because, like a vegetable, it threw out a few seeds or generated a number of groups who spread nothing but opinions. It is necessary to interpret Di Giovanni's activity and its relationship with the Argentinian anarchist movement in this context.

Last, it is necessary to say something about the possible 'accidents' which every revolutionary must try, as far as possible to avoid in the course of the attack against power. These 'accidents' are always quite deplorable because they are seen in a negative light by the mass of the exploited, and because they endanger the lives of people who, taken individually, are not responsible for one particular act of repression. But when the violent act, decided by a militant or group of militants, is carried out with opportune analysis and guarantee; when its political opportunity has been considered and it is carried out with the maximum possibility of comprehension by the mass; and the militant or group are really part of the armed minority of the exploited: then if the action causes an 'accident' and someone dies during the course of it, we cannot condemn the action and the comrades who carried it out.

In any case, even when we don't agree with a particular action and criticism seems justified, we must always bear in mind that our criticism cannot go beyond that particular action. To go on to draw general principles from it—however logical they might seem—is always gratuitous and dangerous from a revolutionary point of view.

Many serious arguments about Di Giovanni would not make sense if the comrades who took part in them, in the past as still today, had not started off with misconceptions about the function and aims of revolutionary action. Osvaldo Bayer's book can supply a key to understanding this problem within the limits of the events he relates and the documents he produces—but it must be used with care.

Alfredo M. Bonanno

Jean Weir

Remarks prior to an explanation of one man's tragedy . . . research and slovenly history.

When Felix Luna put it to me that I should prepare a piece on the anarchist *pistoleros* for the historical magazine that he edited, I felt none of the enthusiasm

with which, on other occasions, I have relished the thought of exploring this or that subject. This, I believed, would be too dry and crude, mere crime reportage involving personalities almost tailor-made for journalistic sensationalism. It would serve no useful purpose except to boost the image of some able inspector or police chief.

At that time I knew little or nothing about Severino Di Giovanni, aside from a piece I had read in a fashionable weekly. The author of that had not bothered even to consult police statements in the contemporary press. The 'facts' as set out were so inaccurate that the writer himself became befuddled and wrote that Rosario is the capital of the province of Santa Fe. Since then I have read occasional crime articles or histories of crime and hold-ups, simply bulging with mistakes (inaccurate dates and places, the misattribution of responsibilities) and quite evidently written on the basis of clippings from earlier newspaper reports, whose authors had written from memory or hearsay, avoiding any rigorous investigation.

Press articles of that sort (the sort still written today when the writer has no time, no vocation and no interest in investigative reporting) are perhaps less to be criticised for their failings since they are unsigned—although they do incalculable harm. What cannot be excused is that mistakes of this sort should be repeated in books which bear an author's by-line, books written by authors who command wide public readership.

For example, one of those who have of late done most to misrepresent the figure of Severino Di Giovanni is Ernesto Sabato. Misrepresenting him is as easy as dressing him up in a silk shirt. In his book *Sobre y tumbas*, Sabato says: "For I saw many such *criollos* in the anarchist syndicates of the port or on the wharfs where the refrigeration ships were moored. Among them was a certain Vallejos who died of starvation on the streets and in whose pocket the police had discovered while searching him, a 100 peso note. They asked why he went hungry when he had so much money. With serene dignity, he answered them, "Because, gentlemen, this money belongs to the union". Yes, there were anarchists cut of the same cloth as Vallejos. Just as there were others, too, of the type of Di Giovanni who, although he published the complete works of Reclus with the proceeds of his hold-ups, also decked himself out in silk shirts to the end of his days; whereas *pistoleros* like Ascaso or Durruti, men of austerity and sincerity up to the moment they fell dead by their machine-guns during the Spanish Civil War, never held back a single centavo of the proceeds from their hold-ups for their personal needs . . . "

The bit about Di Giovanni's silk shirts came from a witticism by inspector Garibotto, the head of the political police. Naturally his words were taken up by all the crime reporters of the press of that day. But neither Di Giovanni's friends, nor his foes, after a search of his wardrobe in the villa in Burzaco and of his person upon his admission to prison had anything to say about silk shirts. His

only affectation during his life was to wear a rather floppy and broad-brimmed black soft hat which he had purchased in *El buen gusto*, the store run by the Torres brothers at 199 Asamblea Street.

Of course, it is all very well for a novelist to resort to improvisation and declare that Di Giovanni used to wear silk shirts. It brings to mind the *Crítica* reporter who, in an effort to exaggerate this tit-bit and make it more news-worthy attributed to the anarchist the wearing of "silk underwear". Or all of the others who decked his fingers with jewels and his wrist with priceless gold watches and sparkling bracelets. The police sheet (shown to the judge, but not publicised by the Press) lists the rather disappointing booty found on the captured anarchist. " . . . a white propelling pencil, a yellow metal watch with a chain made of the same stuff, a tiny keyring with 3 keys attached, one of them of the Yale sort (Canon make), one ordinary key and one smaller, padlock type."

Basically, when an intelligent writer like Sabato credits an anarchist with wearing silk shirts, he does so in an attempt to discredit him. No matter whether the story is unfair or inaccurate. The point is to conjure up a caricature or to toss in something that can be improvised upon. We find the same thing from Beatriz Guido in her *El incendio y las visperas*. She needed a character of story-book dimensions to add that certain something to her novel. And in Argentina one would be hard pressed to come up with a life more resembling the stuff of which novels are made than the life of Severino Di Giovanni. Furthermore, Di Giovanni was a man hunted by the police and outcast by society, so it was relatively simple to seize upon him and say any outrageous thing about him. Why put oneself to the trouble of doing a little research? That sort of thing is best left to bookworms or cowards, it is not for successful writers. Consequently, Beatriz Guido did not even bother to establish that Di Giovanni's first name was Severino and not Salvador (it is all one to the victim of the firing squad) or that he had no sisters (Beatriz Guido claims two for him) or that Lieutenant Franco did not, in fact, attend the execution (it is all one . . . what does it matter!) and that he did not bequeath three flats (sic) in Burzaco. Nor did she bother to find out that he had never had a nephew called Alcobendas or anything of the sort. But then these are unimportant details because a one-time *pistolero* and anarchist called Di Giovanni is the sort of godsend one does not shrink from seizing upon.

Before we conclude our review of historical gaffes, deficiencies of tact and also, occasionally, of intellectual honesty—let us turn to the prime offender, one Arturo Jauretche. (Understandable, really—after all, Di Giovanni was an alien, a *tano*, in fact, who had not been fortunate enough to have been born on the plains of La Rioja or to have been a rancher in Cerrillos). Intoxicated by a whimsical obsession with establishing whether Beatriz Guido is a half-breed or a thoroughbred, he alludes to the grand (sic) piano allegedly discovered in the home of Di Giovanni's

nephew and says . . . "it may have been used as a storage bin—and remember that this was the Di Giovanni family home—for bombs and machine-guns. The dead man was that sort of a fellow . . . "

This is merely gratuitous speculation resorting to squalid fantasy when Jauretche's duty (remember, he likes to style himself a "revisionist") was to have set straight the historical errors so thoughtlessly committed by Beatriz Guido.

But let us turn to the REAL Di Giovanni. The research I have carried out has led me to the conclusions which the reader may examine below. Those researches were slow and painstaking but most fruitful. I discovered a man set in a very particular historical context. The man cannot be thoroughly understood unless one first understands the context in which he acted.

I have stuck to the strictly historical, to documentary evidence and to eye-witness statements. Should there be any witness whom I have not been able to trace or discover, let that witness come forward. I would regard it as a duty to revise anything which is not unassailable fact, anything which (up to now) I have regarded as accurate and truthful. For I have only set down in these pages that which I believe to be verifiable, historical fact.

Osvaldo Bayer

Background Notes

Hipólito Yrigoyen (1850–1930), lawyer, member of the Radical Civic Union and nephew of the party's founder, Leandro Alem. The Radical Party was opposed to the ruling oligarchy and championed universal suffrage; that was the extent of its programme. Because the oligarchy was excluding other sectors of the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie from power, three 'revolutions' erupted under radical leadership, in 1890, 1893 and 1905. Hipólito Yrigoyen led the last two. After the death of Alem, Yrigoyen became the undisputed head of the Radical Civic Union, the apostle (as his followers used to call him) of free elections and administrative efficiency. In fact the oligarchy had based its power upon the total absence of democracy. But fearing that other sections of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie might achieve power through seditious activities with the backing of the workers and peasants, some members of the oligarchy decided to promulgate the *Saenz Peña* law which established a Secret and Compulsory Ballot. As a result, Yrigoyen became president in 1916 and an enthusiastic populace unharnessed the horses drawing the presidential coach and carried Yrigoyen in triumph to the government palace. It should be stressed that the rule of the oligarchy safeguarded the interests of the British imperialists and of the Argentinian bourgeoisie as a

whole: those at least who were large scale producers of livestock or cereals, large exporters or belonged to financial consortia. On the other hand broad sectors of landowners, industrialists, traders and petty bourgeois were excluded from power under the oligarchy. Needless to say the urban and rural proletariat were totally excluded from power. The capitalist development of the country, however, required that these social strata be integrated into the system. Consequently, various segments of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie joined the Radical Civic Union in pursuit of their capitalistic interests. For quite other reasons, the masses of the urban and rural poor flooded into the party.

Yrigoyen's First Presidency (1916–1922)—Yrigoyen was elected president with a majority of more than 100,000 votes over his main rivals and enjoyed huge popular support. His election was an historic moment in Argentinian history: it signaled the bursting on to the political stage of the masses of the people, hitherto excluded by the oligarchy. It was, indeed, the first time their wishes had been canvassed. This new development posed a threat not only to the ruling classes, but also to British imperialist interests. The outbreak of the First World War enabled the Argentinian government to trade more closely with Britain: the Argentinian bourgeoisie amassed great wealth thanks to the war in Europe. Yrigoyen clung to the neutrality policy of V. de la Plaza, one of the most loyal representatives of the oligarchy and of British imperialism. At the war's end, Yrigoyen proposed to the League of Nations that small nations should enjoy the same rights as large ones: when the Great Powers rejected this proposal, Yrigoyen recalled the Argentinian delegation. In government, Yrigoyen advanced the interests of the British and of the Argentinian bourgeoisie to whom he partly owed his election, but he took a clear stand against the local oligarchy which never forgave him for snatching power from their grasp. During his first presidency he carried out a vaguely popular policy (establishing a minimum wage, reducing rents, regulating work at home, establishing concilation and arbitration facilities for strikes, with a slight bias in favour of the labouring class). This posed no threat to capitalist profits which had soared during the war years. Yrigoyen hesitated to repress strikes and went so far as to invite the workers to meet him in the presidential palace for talks. This policy rendered sterling service to capitalist interests insofar as, up to 1916, Argentine's trade unions had been marked by a pronounced revolutionary militancy, little inclined to countenance pacts with employers and ministers. With labour movement support, Yrigoyen achieved two things: on the one hand he achieved the strength to oppose the large bourgeoisie and, on the other, the working class itself was absorbed into the system (any autonomous move by workers was dealt with by police and troops). From 1915 onwards, the Argentinian proletariat struggled fiercely against crushing exploitation by the capitalists. In

1915, 12,000 came out on strike; in 1916, 24,000; in 1917, 136,000; and in 1919, 300,000.

La Semana Trajica (The Tragic Week)—from 7 to 14 January 1919, the metal workers of Buenos Aires carried the poor and the working class with them in a general strike which brought Argentina to a standstill. The strike had its origins in the dire poverty in which Argentina's proletariat lived. The Yrigoyen government mobilized the police and the army: these had assistance from the fascistic groups of the Patriotic League. Among those who commanded the troops and ordered them to open fire on the workers was a young lieutenant by the name of Juan Domingo Peron.

The Workers' Uprising in Patagonia—Two years after the Tragic Week, the Yrigoyen government again massacred workers, this time in the district of Santa Cruz in the south of the republic. Labourers there had struck and occupied some of the larger factories; the army moved in and imposed martial law throughout the area, shooting down hundreds of labourers and imprisoning thousands more.

Towards the end of his first term as president, Yrigoyen resisted the separation of Church and State as well as divorce laws and, instead, strengthened his connections with the leading ally of British imperialism and the oligarchy—the Catholic Church. Yrigoyen was followed by—

Marcelo T. Alvear, President of Argentina from 1922 to 1928. Alvear stood for the right wing of the Radical Civic Union. It is worth pointing out that it was under his presidency that US imperialist interests began to infiltrate Argentina. However, Alvear also safeguarded the interests of British imperialism and the native oligarchy.

1928—In this year Yrigoyen was returned to power with a vote of 800,000 against 400,000 for his opponents. British capitalists welcomed his return whilst the oligarchy, scared by his 'people's government' began to conspire with the army towards the overthrow of Yrigoyen. As the protector of British capital, Yrigoyen attacked US capital as a threat to the peoples of Latin America. Yrigoyen planned to nationalise Argentina's oil and thereby to attack the US Standard Oil. This nationalisation plan had the blessing of the British who saw in it a chance to retain their ascendancy over US capital in Argentina. The scheme was approved, but on . . .

6 September 1930—The army mounted a coup d'etat against Yrigoyen. The bourgeoisie had had enough of a government with populist and workerist overtones.

The bourgeois rights achieved by Yrigoyen were eradicated by General Uriburu who dreamed of installing a Mussolini-style government. Bourgeois and petty bourgeois paraded behind troops through the streets of Buenos Aires, chanting "Death to the Tyrant!". The working class did nothing, although several important segments of it were favourably disposed towards Yrigoyen. The socialists and communists, however, argued that Yrigoyen was a fascist. The upshot of the coup d'etat of September 6 1930 was the restoration of the conservative and oligarchic reaction. The decade 1930–1940 was to be known as the decade of infamy.

The F.O.R.A. (Federacion Obrera Regional Argentina)—During the 4th Congress of the FOA (*Federacion Obrera Argentina*), a decision was taken that the name should be changed to the FORA. The 5th Congress was held in August 1905 and there it was established that the FORA subscribed to the precepts of Anarchist Communism and looked to the general strike as the instrument to usher in the Social Revolution. The Congress also rejected unity with the UGT (a confederation socialist in outlook). The FORA was in the vanguard of workers' struggles with genuinely revolutionary strikes and other activities. During those years some valuable gains were made—children under the age of eleven were banned from working. Night-work was banned, the employers were held accountable for accidents on the job, the working day was shortened, and trade union halls were set up, etc. In September 1906, the FORA decided to summon a unification congress for workers' organisations. The sessions began in March the following year and more than 100 groups attended, 30 of which were autonomous. The socialists were put in a minority: the attempt to dissolve the congress before it could discuss the question of trade union unity failed.

Simon Radowitzky—A young Russian immigrant who, shortly after arriving in Argentina, hurled a bomb at Colonel Falcon and his secretary, killing them both. Radowitzky explained that his attack had been mounted to avenge the workers killed on 1 May 1909 when Colonel Falcon had ordered his men to open fire on a workers' demonstration. The assassination of Falcon took place on 14 November 1909. The government unleashed a savage repression against the workers; anarchist and socialist publications were banned and foreign-born workers were deported. Radowitzky died in Mexico in the 1960s.

(These notes were taken from the Italian edition of O. Bayer's book, published by Edizione Collana Vallera, Pistoia, 1973).

I. Face to face with the enemy

> To monotonously live the mouldy hours of the ordinary people, the submissive, the accommodated, a life of convenience, is not living, it is only vegetating and carrying around an amorphous mass of flesh and bones. To life one should give the exquisite elevation of the rebellion of the arms and the mind.
>
> Severino Di Giovanni, January 10 1929

At the top of the great staircase of the Colón Theatre stands the Conte di Viano, Luigi Aldrovandi Marescotti, Italy's ambassador in Buenos Aires. He awaits the arrival of the president of the Argentine Republic. Applause breaks out, as Don Marcelo T. Alvear arrives in the company of Dona Regina Pacini. Behind the couple troop the ministers of the Interior, Foreign Affairs and Education.

That this is a gala night is self evident. The Italian community has resolved to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the accession of Victor Emmanuel III to the throne with all due pomp and circumstance. The high point is to be this great gala night at the Colón Theatre on the evening of Saturday June 6 1925.

Tonight will put the Italian ambassador to the test. First because he is well aware that Mussolini himself is closely watching how his regime goes down with the Italian colony in Argentina; and secondly, because he must display flair and efficiency in his dealings with other ambassadors who have misgivings about fascism.

One thing is certain: tonight the Colón Theatre might as easily be in the heart of Rome as of Buenos Aires. The occasion has been superbly organised with all the ostentation typical of fascist events. Any attempted disruption will be dealt with instantly by the young blackshirts of the Italian colony. The local delegates of the Fascio have attended to every detail in this respect.

The orchestra's finest virtuosi are present. The women-folk of the wealthier Italian bourgeoisie have donned their finest gowns for the gala which is to be the culmination of the day's events. They whisper coyly, casting admiring glances at the uniforms with all their finery, especially the uniforms of the diplomats and military personnel. The Bersaglieri draw a sigh from more than one middle-aged matron.

As he enters the presidential box, President Alvear is received with enthusiastic applause. The young blackshirts, positioned at strategic points, keep a careful watch. This will be a real triumph for the loyal sons of Italy.

Suddenly, the municipal orchestra strikes up the national anthem. All is now seriousness and circumspection. Everyone on his feet. The music wafts through the air like a balm to soothe the nerves set on edge by these great occasions. The anthem ends. Respectful applause. The orchestra launches in on the Italian royal march. Now the Latin temperament is beyond restraint. Eyes fill with tears. Blood courses through the veins of all these men, united but so far from their homeland. Those cadences! The orchestra rises to its task. Gruff voices can be heard. Everyone sings. Italy is entering a new epoch. She is reborn: she is Rome once again.

But it would appear that there is someone here tonight who would spoil the night for these enthusiastic folk. Barely audible, a murmur rises from the balcony. The ambassador sings on. No, this cannot be happening. But it is. The ambassador starts, as if shaken out of his sleep when, amid all the voices he discerns, or thinks he discerns one crying out:

"Assassins! Thieves! Long live Matteotti!"

Still the ambassador is not quite sure he is hearing correctly. This cannot be happening. But yes, unfortunately it is. Before the very nose of Luigi Aldrovandi Marescotti, Conte di Viano, hundreds of leaflets flutter to the ground. The shouting can be heard more distinctly now.

"Thieves! Assassins! Long live Matteotti!"

The whole auditorium is on its feet, gazing upwards. Still the leaflets rain down. The orchestra plays but no one pays it any heed now. It is the cries of "Assassins! Thieves!" that hold their attention now. There is fighting in the balcony.

The disruption has come from the first row of the balcony. Barely eight or ten people started shouting as the royal march struck up, and began to throw their leaflets to the stalls below. The blackshirts have failed to react with expected swiftness, precisely because they had failed to anticipate an attack of this sort. Recovering from their surprise, they hurl themselves with outraged indignation upon the subversives.

But they are putting up a good fight. There is a general free for all. Neighbouring rows in the balcony empty as the women scream and the men flee. Punch and counter-punch. The truncheons which the fascists had stashed in a corner now come out. But these trouble-makers are hard-headed, it would seem. There is one fair haired man in particular, defending himself like a lion. He has taken up one of the leaflets and is shouting in a booming voice that reaches the stalls—

"Worshipers of the Savoyard monarchy, you have forgotten that it was during the reign of your Victor Emmanuel III, king of Italy, by the grace of God and the wishes of—very few—"

A blackshirt grips him about the throat and hauls him backwards across the seats. But this dark-suited, blond-haired fellow is as strong as an ox. He frees

himself from those who are trying to punch and kick him, leans over the front seats, and continues—

"—a king of Italy fed on the blood spilled by bandits who style themselves Fascisti—with all their Duminis, Filipellis, Rossis, Di Vecchis, Regazzis; and Farinaccis—and who have discovered in Benito Mussolini—"

The fighting continues without quarter. One group of men are punching and biting one another on the floor. The wreckers are defending themselves tooth and nail but all the time the blackshirts are receiving more reinforcements. Socialites down in the galleries feel it incumbent upon themselves to go up there and restore order. Young and old (the latter carrying walking sticks) race up the staircase to give the troublemakers their just desserts. Now firemen and police join in. The orchestra is struggling to continue but its music sounds a little less martial than before.

Some of the protesters are almost overcome. Ten or twelve fists and canes rain blows on their heads. But the young fair-haired fellow in the black suit remains standing on one of the seats continuing his much-interrupted speech.

"—in Benito Mussolini, the most perfect incarnation of all infamy. You glorifiers of the monarchy sustained by the knives of the likes of Dumini, write this glorious name in the annals of your House of Savoy—the name of Matteotti!"

He cannot continue. Steely arms have seized the young rebel by the throat whilst one of the blackshirts rains blow upon blow at his left eye. As they drag him along the aisle he still has the strength to shout:

"Remember the 700 murdered in 1898 by the artillery of your Umberto the Good!"

Everyone wants to get at him—these elegant gentlemen whose faces are now twisted with rage—and the young men with their warlike expressions.

In the end, the ten protesters are subdued and handed over to the firemen and police. They are herded into the foyer of the theatre and handcuffed. When the police wagon comes they are led out one by one. They have to step forward and run the gauntlet of an outraged crowd. Before climbing into the wagon the fair-haired young rebel spits into the face of one Italian officer who wears the headgear of the Bersaglieri, and shouts out:

"Long live anarchy!"

On the basis of newspaper reports of the time and of the testimony of eye witnesses we have reconstructed the Colón Theatre incident in order to give the reader an idea of the climate among the Italian community in Argentina around that time. It was deeply divided by political beliefs and violence.

As far as the men of the political police bureau were concerned, the outcome of the disorders at the Colón Theatre were as follows: Ten people were arrested on the spot; also collected were "two wooden cudgels, one cane, one slouch hat, two

black homburgs and one pair of pince nez spectacles with the right-hand frame broken and the glass missing."

Of the ten people arrested, nine refused to disclose their ideological sympathies or any other information required of them by the arresting officers. Only one of the party was forthright in his answers: the young fair-haired fellow dressed in black who had taken the worst beating of all and had a black eye. His recorded answers to the police were as follows:

Asked what he had gone to the Colón Theatre to do, his reply was, "That he went along to this act of homage to the king of Italy in order to distribute a thousand leaflets in which an effort was made to show the harmful influence which the House of Savoy had had, and the inevitable consequences which will flow from the government of Signor Mussolini."

Questioned as to his actions inside the theatre, he answered:

"(. . .) that when the band struck up the Italian royal march he tossed the leaflets into the air whereupon they fluttered down to the stalls below. Then a person who had been ordered to restrain him appeared and punched him in the left eye, other persons joining in until he lost consciousness."

Asked whether he knew the other accused, Nazareno Tirabassi, Antonio Di Marco, Dionisio Di Giustini, Carlos Romano, Agostino Del Medico and Domingo Coliberti, he answered:

"That he went to the theatre alone, but, once in the balcony, met with other antifascists whose names he does not know."

Questioned as to his ideological sympathies, he answered:

"That for four years he has been an active anarchist."

Asked whether he engaged in propaganda on behalf of his beliefs, he said:

"He propagates anarchism by means of lectures or articles published in newspapers and magazines, in particular critiques of the present Italian government. He has had some items published in the anarchist periodical *L'Avennire*, the organ of the Italian anarchist collective."

Pressed to state whether he believed in violence as a means of effecting social change, he replied:

"That he repudiates any act that implies violence, his way of thinking having more in common with Tolstoy than with Ravachol."

Asked whether he belonged to any he answered:

"That he belongs to no trade cause he is anti-organisation."

Finally, he stated that he was a compositor, employed by the Polli printing works in Morón. And he went on to state freely that his home was at 1389 Yatay Street, also in Morón.

The police were somewhat perplexed. They were not used to arrested persons admitting their political affiliations with such candour. This 24 year old with his

likeable manner and attractive features had answered their questions without so much as a hint of cheek, as if trusting in the rightness of his beliefs.

He made no objection to appending his signature to his statement and in a firm hand signed: Severino Di Giovanni. Even though Di Giovanni had been taken into custody, not as a result of any crime but as a consequence of brawling between fellow nationals of a foreign community, the men of the Political Bureau already had him classified as "a dangerous anarchist agitator". The fact was that the trained eyes of the police had not failed to notice his resolve and steadfastness.

Although Di Giovanni had arrived in the country from Italy only two years before, he spoke Spanish fluently with only the merest trace of an Italian accent. His birthplace was Chieti—in the Abruzzi, some 180 kilometres west of Rome—where he was born on March 17, 1901. "Little is known of his childhood years" *L'Adunata dei Refrattari* (an anarchist periodical of the Italian community in the United States) was to write—but it is known that as a child he was intelligent, lively and defiant of family authority and that his parents sent him away for a time to an institute in Ancona."

He trained to be a teacher, but never got his diploma. Nonetheless, he did find a position in a village in the Abruzzi. Italy was short of teachers (the war had claimed the lives of many young men) and had to rely on youths who were scarcely more than adolescents, to fill the positions left vacant by those who had been killed or who had been sent to the front in this, the last year of the war.

In his spare time, meanwhile, Severino was training as a printer. And reading voraciously . . . Proudhon, Bakunin, Reclus, Kropotkin, Malatesta, Nietzsche, Stirner, Nettlau . . .

His parents died a short time later. By 1921 Severino (then aged 20) was wholeheartedly committed to the anarchist ideal. The violence of the world war which had provided the backdrop to his adolescent years (and that war was a sad, miserable affair which Italians were drawn into, in spite of themselves) yielded to the even greater violence of the postwar years that culminated in the advent of fascism. Freedom of the individual now vanished. Any member of the opposition had a choice: he could go to prison or emigrate. Severino Di Giovanni followed the course chosen by the leaders of Italian anarchism and turned his back on Italy. That was in 1922. By then, Severino had married Teresa Masculli, a simple girl who was deeply in love with him, a quiet, pleasant girl whom he always called Teresina. The Di Giovanni family consisted of three brothers. Severino emigrated to Argentina, Alessandro to France and Giuseppe remained in Italy.

In May 1923, Di Giovanni and his wife arrived in Buenos Aires aboard the steamship Sofía. Between that time and the disorders in the Colón Theatre, Di Giovanni lived the average existence of the politically conscious printing workers of the time. He was a good skilled worker: normally he worked as a compositor

but he could also turn his hand to linotype work. By day he worked in the print shop: in the evenings he frequented anarchist meetings or meetings of antifascist groups. At all times his associates were fellow-Italians.

Severino and Teresina's union was a fruitful one: by 1925 they had two daughters, Laura and Aurora. Ilvo and Maria were to come later.

On January 31 1931, *L'Italia del Popolo* (the liberal socialist daily of the Italian community), described the Di Giovanni of these days as follows:

"We first encountered him at antifascist meetings. Needless to say he was decidedly against all of the political varieties of antifascism. In his eyes socialists, democrats, and above all communists were indistinguishable from the fascists. At meetings he would distribute or offer for sale papers and magazines of anarchist persuasion and was outspoken about his disagreements with the speakers. As he saw it, the organised antifascism of every tendency was pulling the wool over the eyes of the masses, and so he started to publish a libertarian periodical entitled *Culmine*. He did the writing, typesetting and printing of it himself in his spare time, depriving himself of sleep."

It is interesting to note such an assessment of him by *L'Italia del Popolo* which was essentially a middle of the road democratic newspaper, especially as this assessment was published at the time that Di Giovanni was appearing before a military tribunal and when the de facto Uriburu government was having few problems with the Freedom of the Press. Indeed every one of the Argentinian papers, without a single exception—and consequently 99 per cent of public opinion in the country—held the anarchist to be nothing but a gangster, a trigger-happy, terrifying assassin. All the more startling then to read these lines in the same edition of *L'Italia del Popolo*. "Nowadays the talk is of a tall elegant Severino Di Giovanni, a man of exceptional physical vigour, elegantly attired—but the truth of the matter is that when we knew him we knew him as a simple fellow with the drawn features of a boy who sometimes went hungry. His dress was more than humble: it was the dress of an ordinary workman jacket and trousers that it only took one glance to see were well-worn, collarless shirt, a scarf about his neck, cap on his head and, on his feet, the usual rope sandals of the working man." "Al Capone", the paper went on, alluding to an editorial in *La Nacíon* which had compared Di Giovanni with the US gangster—"was nowhere to be seen. With fine features, blond going on chestnut coloured hair and slightly flushed complexion, there was in his sea-blue eyes an intense, almost feverish glint. . . "

Before embarking upon our catalogue of the spiral of violence unleashed by Severino Di Giovanni over a four year period—(with all its gamut of cruelty, romanticism, legend, daring and that indefinable something that oscillated between the incredibly criminal and the impassioned personal "taking of the law into his own hands'—one head of the police Political Bureau even made the *faux pas* of

describing him as a modern Robin Hood), we want to touch upon the character and psychology of the man as they were prior to the beginning of his implacable persecution. Because for four long years he was a hunted animal, a man pursued by society—and a man in such circumstances has to react in a very different way.

Alberto S. Bianchi (a journalist on *La Antorcha* and an exceptional anarchist orator in the 1920s and 1930s) knew Di Giovanni in the years before he became a wanted man and has this graphic description to give of him: . . . "Di Giovanni was like a bubbling Italian wine that has just been uncorked: overpowering, enthusiastic, highly active. Of attractive demeanor. Once his day's work was done, it was his passion to labour away with type and ink to give expression to his ideas either in leaflets or in his own self-printed papers, which he financed with his own money. I remember him grabbing a bite at a sandwich whilst composing type throughout long nights of feverish work."

Donato Antonio Rizzo, the then director of *La Antorcha* (and a man opposed to Di Giovanni's methods, although he was one of those who never denied him help when he had need of it) has left us this description of the scene when they met in the workshop at 1689 Rioja Street, "When I met him, Di Giovanni was working in the workshop of the Bank of Boston. He always stole something from the workshop, especially inks, in order to keep down costs on his journal *Culmine*. He did all of the work himself. He did the bulk of the writing himself, set the type, ran it off and even saw to the distribution. He was one of those fellows who want to do everything themselves because they think that, otherwise, it will never get done. Food was forgotten during endless hours of work. Now and then he would chew a piece of hard bread—immersing himself all the while in his task. He was a creature of impulse and given to spontaneous, intuitive reactions. He dressed humbly but with dignity. When I knew him he was not the kind to care about outside appearances".

L'Adunata dei Refrattari of New York was to say, "Anyone who can recall him in the days when he was not yet an outlaw knows how zealously he devoted himself to the propagation of libertarian ideas and will recall how, although an impetuous fellow, his lively spirits won him friends and companions."

This is the crucial point: Severino Di Giovanni was, above all else, a self-educated man. His handwriting, for instance, is more reminiscent of the hand of a calligrapher rather than of a labourer. His style is stormy, overpowering, forthright and to the point. He did not possess the intellectual sophistication of those days but neither was he, as his detractors claimed, almost illiterate. His writing is clear, slightly imitative perhaps, but his language owes much to journalese—an interesting style, a writer who knows very well how to address the mass audience. Many of his pieces, published in Argentina, or in New York

have been attributed to Aldo Aguzzi. But wrongly so. Aguzzi—one of the most gifted of the Italian anarchist intellectuals who emigrated to Argentina—has a markedly different style. Whilst, in the field of theory, Aguzzi was Di Giovanni's revered mentor and while his style (which is, naturally enough, superior to Di Giovanni's) was very different, that does not mean that what Di Giovanni wrote was worthless. Quite the contrary. Di Giovanni's pieces go far beyond mere pamphleteering.

As a self taught man, Di Giovanni believed in theory im- plicitly. And in his tragic naivete he believed that theory was made to be applied. If Bakunin or Kropotkin stated that, for the revolution and the achievement of freedom, all means are legitimate, Di Giovanni would use those means. For that reason, once Di Giovanni began to frequent anarchist circles, he turned into something of an irritant figure. Obviously this fellow wanted to put the theory into practice right here and now. He wanted to mobilise, take to the streets and make their revolution. He knew nothing of dialectics or circumstance or the ripening of conditions. As far as he was concerned what he had read during his study sessions was to be implemented. And he held that all anarchists are capable of taking to the streets, throwing bombs and shooting it out with the enemy.

The social system is an unjust one, the powerful are no better than thieves robbing the poor, and the police made up of armed thugs to protect the loot of the powerful. It only remained, therefore, to rob the powerful and return that loot to its rightful owners, to smash the police and constituted authority and anything that served the interests of the bourgeois class. Fancy words and lectures could not do it. It took guns and bombs to do it. It required terror against their terror. *Face to face with the enemy*, as Di Giovanni entitled that section of his paper *Culmine* where he catalogued attacks on the society which he regarded as his enemy.

Although Di Giovanni concentrated more on maintaining contacts with the Italian anarchists rather than with native Argentinians, the split in the ranks of anarchists in Argentina was to have a direct bearing upon his whole tragedy.

Argentinian anarchists (whose movement was the biggest in the whole of Latin America) were divided between the *protestistas* (around the journal *La Protesta*, run by Emilio Lopez Arango and Diego Abad de Santillán), the *antorchistas* (around their paper *La Antorcha*) whose theorists were Rodolfo Gonzalez Pacheco and Teodoro Antilli, the latter of whom died at an early age but whose ideas remained influential for many years afterwards, and, (outside of these two basically theoretical groups) the anarchosyndicalists grouped together in the FORA or in autonomous unions (among which the bakers' union was distinguished on account of its militancy).

In short, *La Protesta* and the FORA came to represent the moderate wing of Argentinian anarchism whereas the autonomous unions and the *La Antorcha* group represented the left wing of the movement. From 1926 onwards, these were joined by the Italian group which grew up around the magazine *Culmine* which represented the extreme left.

The *La Protesta* group was indisputably the most important and the fact that it had its own presses enabled it to publish *La Protesta* as a daily paper without financial worries. Administratively, it was very solid, so much so that its managers pointed out that, in terms of commercial viability and credit worthiness, it was second only to the bourgeois paper *La Prensa*. The *La Protesta* people were opposed to insurrectional activity. Indeed, the *antorchistas* argued that the *Protestistas* were more concerned with protecting and safeguarding their presses than with seeing the idea implemented. We shall see how the figure of Severino Di Giovanni was unwittingly to deepen the gulf between the two factions and how his deeds would give rise to a debate which would end only after his execution by a firing squad.

Whilst the Buenos Aires Police's Political Bureau opened a file on Di Giovanni only after the fracas in the Colón Theatre, his name had earlier—on October 25, 1924—found its way on to the records of the Provincial Police following his involvement in an affray at a labour meeting. It is worth noting that, whereas his thoughts were almost wholly centred upon his native Italy and organising against fascism, he did not ignore the ups and downs of the Argentinian anarchists or the country's working class.

Thus, from the pages of *Culmine* he supported *La Antorcha* in its dispute with the daily paper *Crítica*. *Crítica*, an evening daily, had problems with distribution workers at the start of 1926. In circumstances which are still obscure, a worker, Raul Pintos, was shot in the head and killed, and another worker by the name of Longo was seriously wounded. A meeting that followed held by the paper's workers was broken up by the police. The affair was kept on the boil by those anarchist groups in agreement with the position of *La Antorcha*. This was because of the involvement of *Crítica*'s editor, one Apolinario Barrera. He had belonged to the *La Protesta* group and for many years he had run this periodical.

Barrera was a very controversial figure. A former petty officer in the war marine, he later joined *La Protesta* and in 1919 risked his life in a romantic attempt to free Simon Radowitzky from the Ushuaia penitentiary. But the 'antorchistas' were always to accuse him of being the cause of the division among anarchists—because he had accepted payments from a certain brewery to help finance the strike in a rival establishment. This fact reached the ears of Rodolfo Gonzalez Pacheco and Antilli, and it led to a split, when the publishing group of *La Protesta* stood by Barrera.

Years later, Barrera joined *Crítica* and became a follower of Botana. When the newsvendor, Pintos, was murdered, *La Antorcha* accused Barrera of firing the fatal shot (although they did not name him, "not being police informers") and even today, over 40 years later, there are still some who are convinced of Barrera's guilt. Eyewitnesses to the crime, printing workers on the *Crítica* staff at the time, contend that the newsvendor Pintos (an anarchist) was killed in a cowardly fashion. A shot was fired into the back of his head from a distance of 10 centimetres by an employee of the distribution company known as *El lungo de Flores*.

Barrera's part in all this? Pintos collapsed at the base of the printing press. Barrera promptly sent for a labourer and with his help carried Pinto's body into the street and dumped it there with the intention of dissociating the paper from the murder and passing the whole thing off as a sort of street brawl.

In any event *La Antorcha* took *Crítica* severely to task over the incident—"As a police paper, given to blackmail, as part of the yellow press, as the prostituted enemy of the workers, *Crítica* has been blacked by the anarchists. *Crítica* is the friend of Santiago (the chief of detectives) and of Urruchua and also of Apolinario Barrera, but these people are not, nor have they ever been, anarchists. But they were and are slave drivers. *Crítica*. Ugh! Disgusting! . . . it stinks of brothels and low-life and the police cell!"

From the columns of his paper, *Culmine*, on February 20, 1926, the as yet unknown Severino Di Giovanni suggested a boycott of *Crítica* by workers. He referred to *Crítica* as—"the mouthpiece of the Camorra". The Il Pensiero Italian anarchist group joined a *Crítica* Boycott Committee whose headquarters were set up at 30 Ecuador Street. Against this background and in a gesture of cooperation Di Giovanni printed leaflets urging people not to buy *Crítica*. Other more violent means proposed by Di Giovanni to bring down Botana's daily were gradually watered down in the committee's long discussions, and it eventually ceased to exist through inaction. In spite of the demise of the committee the pages of *Culmine* continued to carry the exhortation: "Boycott *Crítica*".

II. For Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti

Let us light the fuse on the dynamite of vengeance!

Severino Di Giovanni, August 1 1927

For the time being, Di Giovanni had other things on his mind. All his energy was devoted to organising a circulating library among Italian-speaking anarchists: it would be based in his home in Morón. In addition, the *Culmine* bookservice offered libertarian books at popular prices. The first titles offered were Bakunin's *The Commune and the State* (at 60 centavos), Nietzsche's *Anti Christ* (75 centavos), Darwin's *Origin of the Species* (2.25 pesos), Kropotkin's *Words of a Rebel* and Malatesta's *Anarchy*, and others.

Italian anarchists in the United States were to write about *Culmine* in their journal *L'Adunata dei Refrattari* in an obituary of Severino Di Giovanni: "Meanwhile *Culmine* continued to be published and comrades recall how, even if it had no great pretentions to literary merit, its columns saw a spirited and absolutely honest defence of our ideals with a truly exceptional courage. The agitation on behalf of Sacco and Vanzetti—involving huge masses of people which filled the public squares in demonstrations—raised the issue of insurrectionist action: Severino Di Giovanni openly argued the need for such action."

That is how it stood. The death sentences passed on the two Italian anarchists, Sacco and Vanzetti in the United States had aroused the wrath of the working class world-wide. Never before had an injustice like this provoked such repercussions on a world scale. Old differences were forgotten as newspapers regardless of political tendency gave over their headlines to recording the progress of the trial. Protest meetings embracing people of every persuasion were held and hundreds of 'Save Sacco and Vanzetti' committees were formed. The pronouncements of the judge and the witnesses were eagerly awaited. In Buenos Aires as in every great capital city the number one topic and concern for many months was the trial of the two immigrant workers.

It is true to say that in Argentina for a whole year the energies of every anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist were directed into protesting against, and demanding the commutation of, the death sentences on Sacco and Vanzetti.

Di Giovanni took the Sacco and Vanzetti case very much to heart. In his actions and opinions he was influenced by the very close contacts he maintained with the New York-based Italian anarchists. He had been appointed the Buenos Aires

correspondent of their principal organ, *L'Adunata dei Refrattari*. It seems that Di Giovanni wanted to show his comrades that great things could be expected from Argentina. How right he was.

On Sunday May 16 1926, at 10am, *La Antorcha* held a meeting about the Sacco and Vanzetti case in the Boedo Theatre: over 250 people attended. The speakers were Rodolfo González Pacheco, Martín Alvarez and, as *La Nación* reported, "a certain Cuello". Carmelo Fredda spoke for the Italian immigrant community. But there was one unscheduled speaker who took the rostrum uninvited: he was an Italian and, as *La Nación* so delicately phrases it, "he spoke in unusual terms". He was Severino Di Giovanni, there to insist upon less talk and more action, more "individual acts", "more violence".

A fine, spontaneous finale to a protest meeting. The unknown speaker won the hearts of the younger and more zealous members of the participants.

As if to confirm his words with actions, the northern quarter of the city was rattled that very night by a deafening explosion. Only minutes after 11pm a powerful bomb exploded at the door of the US Embassy at the corner of Arroyo and Carlos Pellegrini Streets. The hole left by the blast was so large that police hurrying to the scene were able to enter the embassy through it. The shield of the United States had been blown out into the middle of the street. Shrapnel from the bomb had shattered bottles on the shelves of a supermarket opposite. Police chief Fernandez hurried to the scene. Inspector Etcheverry and chief of detectives, Santiago, joined him in offering apologies to ambassador Peter A. Jay.

The device had consisted of two cannon balls made in San Lorenzo. The motive for the attack was patently obvious—it was part of the campaign to have Sacco and Vanzetti freed. The police's first move was to raid the offices of the 'Save Sacco and Vanzetti Committee', at 1698 Rioja Street. There they arrested the 'well known' anarchist Carlos Ravetto along with Rodolfo González Pacheco. At 2452 Ombú Street in Valencia they arrested Valentin Alsina and the secretary of the protest committee, Pedro Faberio. They confiscated an entire edition of *La Antorcha* and at the anarchist local at 3270 Bartolomé Mitre Street, some seventy men were taken away, along with a drum of tar and electrical light bulbs which filled with tar made bombs suitable for use against house fronts.

But the chief of detectives was not looking for tar-bombs. He was after whoever had planted the embassy bomb. And through an informer he heard that at the Boedo Theatre meeting a young, blond Italian had spoken of filling the city with bombs. That Italian had to be hunted down and caught.

Meanwhile the Argentine Patriotic League, headed by Manuel Carles was on the alert. This nationalist youth body was composed of the well to do young men from the northern quarter and students from catholic colleges. It had played

an important part in the repression of workers during the Tragic Week and the labour revolt in Patagonia, and had not been resting on its laurels since then. It stood ready to smash the anarchists, or anybody else with 'anti-Argentinian ideas'. When the bombing happened, the League promptly offered its services to the US ambassador. Within minutes of the blast, young Emilio R. Casares junior who lived near the embassy was the first to approach the ambassador and condemn the outrage. As a result, the US ambassador was to send the following note to Doctor Manuel Carlés:

"Permit me to acknowledge the effective and intelligent assistance so readily loaned by Don Emilio Casares junior, just a few minutes after the explosion. I congratulate you upon the admirable organisation which enabled him to be on the scene with his assistance immediately after the perpetration of this outrage which, I am convinced, has been instigated by pernicious alien elements and not by citizens of the great Argentine Republic".

The Political Bureau applied to the Italian embassy for a list of the most dangerous of the Italian anarchists who had lately emigrated to Argentina. On the list was the name of Severino Di Giovanni whom the Italian embassy had never forgiven for the Colón Theatre episode. The police were to have no problems locating Di Giovanni. On the occasion of his first arrest, he had volunteered his address in the Morón district. On May 21 the Di Giovanni home was searched. Severino was taken away, and with him, hundreds of books and pamphlets.

He was held for five days by the Central Department by way of 'softening-up' and then a statement was taken from him on May 26, notwithstanding the irreproachable democratic credentials of President Don Marcelo T. Alvear. But the police have always had the knack of pursuing their inquiries despite any "minor trespasses against the freedom of the individual". The statement Di Giovanni made was as objective and to the point as ever: "Yes, I was arrested while leaving my home".

Asked about his job, he said: "that for two years he had concentrated on publishing, as a journalist, the magazine *Culmine* of which he is the owner". Asked whether he had participated in the Sacco and Vanzetti support meeting in the Boedo Theatre, he stated—"that he attended the meeting in support of Sacco and Vanzetti but watched the proceedings from a doorway without actually going inside the building".

Questioned as to his beliefs, he replied, "that his sympathies lie with the anarchist ideal".

Asked whether he had taken part in the blast at the US embassy, he answered: "No".

Some forty-eight hours later, a magistrate released him for lack of evidence. Even so, both Santiago and the chief of police were firmly convinced of Di Giovanni's guilt, while he looked at them defiantly and with contempt each time he replied.

But Sacco and Vanzetti were not executed that year. Their agony in Charlestown jail was to continue for a further 15 months. Their fate lay in the hands of judge Thayer and Governer Fuller. Petition followed petition but one after another they were rejected. Worldwide agitation increased: bombs went off in Barcelona, Paris and Madrid, and acts of terrorism were carried out wherever the proletariat was organised to any extent.

Severino Di Giovanni had learned that speaking the truth only brought trouble: he had given them his address and his home had been ransacked. And they had confiscated the library which he had collected with such sacrifice and so much care. Now he urgently needed to find a new address which was not known to the police.

Through *La Antorcha* he had got to know two young men who greatly admired him on account of his intervention at the Boedo Theatre meeting: Alejandro and Paulino Scarfó. Thus was born a friendship that was to last exactly four years and which would have dire consequences for all three of them. But the direst consequences of all were to hit the Scarfó family which would be most cruelly afflicted by events.

Alejandro and Paulino Scarfó were patently idealistic youths, ever ready to work for the anarchist cause. Di Giovanni asked them whether they knew of someone who would rent an apartment to him and his family. As coincidence would have it the parents of the boys were renting out a room in their home at 3834 Monte Egmont Street (Tres Arroyos today). Severino Di Giovanni went to live there.

The Scarfó family lived simply in a typical suburban house with a balcony, internal courtyard and pots of flowers. Pedro Scarfó (the father) was an Italian worker already over sixty years of age: his wife, Catalina Romano was around fifty. They had eight children—Antonio, José, Alejandro, Domingo, Paulino, Josefa América, Santa and Asunto—all of them Argentine-born. The real head of the household was Antonio, the eldest son: he set an example to his brothers by his work and study. He obtained work as a book-keeper. He kept a close eye on the progress of his brothers but had not been able to prevent Alejandro and Paulino from developing an interest in politics, and, worse still from becoming anarchists. But at home the whole thing was regarded as a youthful phase—an ailment which the passage of time would heal. Of all the Scarfó children, one was of exceptional intelligence: Josefa América, ('Fina' to her brothers) who attended the Estanislao Zeballos grammar school.

Four years later, when tragedy had struck the family, the mother of the Scarfós was to describe the arrival of Di Giovanni in her home: "One day some years ago a man arrived at our home to rent a room. He was Severino Di Giovanni. He seemed agreeable to the rent and we sealed our bargain. The next day he returned with his wife, Teresina, and their three children. He seemed a good man, of simple appearance. He spoke well of the poor and spent hours reading his books. He worked as a compositor. At that time the three were not yet twenty . . . Paulino was 19, Alejandro 17 and América 15. Di Giovanni began to lend them books. They became fast friends. With his great charm he became friendly with them and began to influence them with his ideas."

But, aside from politics, the arrival of Di Giovanni in the Scarfó home introduced something else again—love. The adolescent América Josefina—passionate, lively and intelligent—was attracted to the newcomer who was not like most men, with all his talk about emancipation of the human being, freedom, and redemption of the poor. He talked about books, and philosophers and politics and encouraged her brothers to struggle, to make a stand and not to join the "sheep in bourgeois society". What started out as admiration grew into a Platonic friendship until it exploded into a novelesque, passionate love that was to be hopelessly pursued through the whirlwind of violence and persecution which Di Giovanni was to plunge into only a few months after moving into the house in Monte Egmont Street.

August 10 1927 was the day appointed for the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti in Charlestown prison. Throughout the year agitation never abated. From the measured if prudent demands of *La Protesta* to the fiery, violent demands that appeared in Di Giovanni's Italian-language journal, not forgetting the poetics and moving editorials of Rodolfo González Pacheco in *La Antorcha*, the anarchists had been labouring the point about the need for a huge mass movement to demonstrate to the bourgeoisie that it could not with impunity murder "two sons of the people".

From the pages of *Culmine*, Di Giovanni was still insisting on violent action and calling for individual acts of protest. This did not pass unnoticed by the police, nor by the US embassy, especially since Di Giovanni was forthright in his opinions. Because alongside the title of the magazine *Culmine* and its subtitle *Anarchist Publication* was printed clearly the information, "correspondence to Severino Di Giovanni, Poste Restante, Box 8, 2535 Rivadavia Street, Buenos Aires (Arg.). Show your face and do not stop at words."

Friday night, July 22 1927 brought a taste of what the campaign to save Sacco and Vanzetti would be like. The Palermo quarter and even the Belgrano quarter shook to a huge explosion. It took the police a long time to trace the source of the blast. They were guided to the spot by a taxi driver who had been dazzled by a pillar of flames. The bomb had been placed against the pedestal of the Washington

monument in the woods in Palermo. It was a very powerful bomb with a dynamite and gelignite base. The damage was not very great as the monument was made of marble and very solid, moreover the explosion happened in the open air.

However, the fact that a marble bench that had sat alongside the pedestal had been flung 500 metres by the force of the blast told something about the power of the charge. A nearby tree had been felled and, as *La Nación* reported, "the soil was carpeted with a layer of myriad leaves reduced to dust as a result of the explosion . . . "

It did not stop there. Apparently the same bombers had been behind a similar explosion some 50 minutes later. This second bomb, although smaller, went off in the city centre. It had been placed in the window of the Ford dealers at the intersection of Peru and Victoria streets. The blast shattered the glass and destroyed a display vehicle and all of the windows for four blocks around.

The police immediately started a great round-up. It was aimed at all members of the Sacco and Vanzetti agitation committee. Journalists were informed by the Central Department that the bombers in both cases had been "dissident *antorchistas* from the FORA". The first to be arrested was the committee secretary Orestes Bar. That was followed by the capture of Miguel Arcángel Roscigna who had been classified as the 'ace' of anarchist expropriators—one of those who carried out robberies to finance the cause. His notoriety in this field would only be eclipsed by that of Severino Di Giovanni.

But the police had made a mistake: Roscigna did other things, not bombings. Indeed, he said as much later during two famous robberies. Where the Political Bureau had not been mistaken, though, was in short-listing Di Giovanni as a possible suspect: his former home in Morón was searched but there police discovered that he had moved house seven months earlier. Di Giovanni had made one mistake—he had confided his new address to the landlord for the purposes of forwarding his mail. Pressurised by the police, the landlord said, "Yes, he is living at 3834 Monte Egmont Street." Off went the police.

One way or another, sooner or later, the police would have discovered Di Giovanni's address because all of his correspondence went to 3834 Monte Egmont Street. He waged a great campaign to help both the Italian anarchist, Gino Lucetti (who had organised an attempt on Mussolini's life) and his family by means of hundreds of leaflets, each of which carried the stamp: "Severino Di Giovanni, 3834 Monte Egmont Street, Buenos Aires". The leaflets were accompanied by a subscriptions list and were sent out to anarchists and anarchist sympathisers in every city and village in the country. Subscription lists for *Culmine*, the Anarchist Publication, were similarly addressed. All of which demonstrates that Di Giovanni had not abandoned his work just because of police harassment.

The raid took place at 3am. The door was opened by one of the Scarfó boys (José). Teresina was forced to get up and told to take the children outside. The room was meticulously searched. The police took away "three exercise books with coloured covers and containing adresses, along with 32 periodicals and several letters". But of Di Giovanni they found no trace.

The police raid came as a shock to the Scarfós who had not suspected Di Giovanni's activities. But one Scarfó, the girl Josefina, watched disdainfully, indignantly, with a sense of impotence as the possessions of her admired mentor were removed.

Although the editorial offices of *Culmine* were raided and the originals of issue number 26 removed (along with a collection of *L'Adunata dei Refrattari* and *La Diana* and despite the fact that he was now forced into hiding, Di Giovanni afforded himself the luxury of sending his magazine out to subscribers on August 1 1927.[1] He had to work day and night, with the tireless assistance of Paulino Scarfó (a compositor like himself) and of José Romano (whom Severino called 'Ramé') a young Italian who was to play an important role in Di Giovanni's life.

Let us dwell for a moment on No 26 of *Culmine* which clearly indicates Di Giovanni's temperament and his ideological direction. On page one in large type one reads: "By a 14 day hunger-strike and by their contempt for the intrigues of Governer Fuller, our two comrades, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti are etching upon the hard bronze plate of our history of rebelliousness, a glowing page of heroic anarchism. They have need of our COOPERATION in solidarity . . . "

The capitalised word "COOPERATION" is followed by an explanation of the meaning of the word. There is a sketch in which there is a man scaling a mountain and bearing a huge bomb with a lighted fuse upon his shoulders. At the summit of the mountain, one reads . . . UTOPIA.

The sketch is followed by the following appeal: "Iconoclasts! Rebels against all oppression and injustice! Young temperaments uncowed by all the storms of life, the time has come when we must COOPERATE with all our powers in order to save the lives of Sacco and Vanzetti, and the revolutionary dignity which moves us. Let us light the fuse on the dynamite of vengeance! Let us destroy the obscene caste of slavers and let us commit ourselves to the most desperate struggle for the complete liberty of the two inmates of the jail at Charlestown!"

[1] Around this time, Di Giovanni was in dire financial straits as was evident from his magazine "Culmine". As with every anarchist publication it set aside some space to keep its readers up to date with the financial state of the magazine. All donations and subscriptions, however modest, were listed and credited to the donors. The state of finances for No. 26 shows a deficit of 1320.50 Argentinian pesos.

On page two, in the *Face to Face with the Enemy* section, Di Giovanni is even more explicit and gives details of the activities undertaken and details of the attacks already carried out.

"Ours will be a cursory account, without the many details so beloved of the journalists of the daily press. By going right to the heart of the matter we shall offer our comrades a chronology of what has been the complement of a much larger protest: we refer to the protest which Sacco and Vanzetti have been mounting these past 14 days in the gloomy cells of Charlestown prison. On the night of Friday, July 22, in the space of one hour, between 10.30pm and 11.30pm, approximately, two bombs were exploded in the centre of Buenos Aires, thereby shattering the glacial silence which has lain like a deadly mantle over the most recent developments to come out of the Sacco and Vanzetti trial. Such direct protest was more than logical—it was necessary, to touch the interests and dearest possessions of the scum who meet in the shadowy recesses of Wall Street.

And so it was done!

The anonymous hands which lighted that fuse could no longer contain the inner torment which has been wracking them for so long, and faced with the jokes, the anecdotes and the political somersaults of Fuller, they opted to strike at the very heart of the monster."

After describing the attacks on the Washington statue and the Ford Motor Company's agency, *Culmine* supports these actions and says:

"We hope that these actions may be only the beginnings of a wider campaign which will be able to bring unity in a highly forceful way to the scattered resources of the anarchists."

After a reading of *Culmine*, the police had not the slightest doubt that the organiser of the attacks was speaking through its columns. Judge Lamarque released Roscigna, Bar, Badaracco, Garrido and Freijo, who had seemed likely suspects, because of the absence of any evidence to connect them with the attacks. The police remained determined to get their hands on Di Giovanni.[2]

---

[2] About this time Severino Di Giovanni received news of the death in Italy of his friend and comrade Paolo Flores. It meant another emotional setback for him and one from which he did not quickly recover. He was to write an article for Culmine, entitled "Our Dead: Paolo Flores" and using the pen-name Essedi (S.D.) . . .

"He wrote to me regularly in recent months. His letters, evading the tentacles of the awful fascist censors, bubbled with a thousand hopes and promises which he planned to grow in the splendid fertile garden of our evergreen ideals. But cruel Death had undermined the future of his burgeoning youth. And just as he was making ready to open up like a bud before the sun's caresses and to enhance the air with his perfumed poetry, he was uprooted, not even granted time enough to as much as hope for the beneficial kiss of life at full flower."

Di Giovanni is notably tender in his writing concerning his dead friend. That tenderness turned to ruthlessness later when action was called for. Apparently he was a wholly impulsive man who

The final date for the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti was set as August 10. On that day, the three main trade union groupings and the unaffiliated unions called for a general protest strike. The day opened with a series of bombings: one in the Courts of justice, another in the Vélez Sársfield railway station and a third on the tracks of the Southern Railways at the Australia Street bridge.

Three huge demonstrations had been scheduled for that evening: at 3pm, in the Plaza Once, a demonstration by the autonomous anarchist unions and the Sacco and Vanzetti agitation committee; simultaneously there was to be a rally

by the FORA in the Plaza Constitución; then at 4.40pm, the COA would demonstrate in the Plaza del Congreso. Alver had authorised the protest meetings, realising that they were the only safety valve available to people who were emotionally prepared to "do anything".

La Antorcha, the anarchist paper, carried the banner headline: "All of the fallen must be avenged. We may hang our heads if they are not!" And the headline on page one suggested . . . "After midnight . . . "

Precisely. Midnight was the hour awaited by agitated masses the world over with something akin to resignation. The campaign to save them had been so massive that the execution of these men was like a crucifixion. People waited for midnight as if a cataclysm was due.

---

surrendered fully to his emotions and behaved as if intoxicated by the whole gamut of colours, struggles, contradictions, beauties, generosities, and be-trayals that life has to offer. Which is to say that he was a true Nietzschian. But to return to his article . . .

" . . . Paolo Flores, a young man of 25 years, an enthusiastic comrade who had slaked his thirst fully upon the pure and crystal spring waters of our movement. Just when we were getting used to the rich potential of his thought and assuaging our hunger on the myriad hopes he offered with such prodigality, his generous plans were curtailed by an illness which carried him swiftly to his death. Weeks before he died he sent me a letter (in which he also spoke of the physical ailments which beset him) that was full of a host of beautiful things which his mind had conceived.

He intended to write a book entitled: "What is to be done: " and in it, to sketch roughly a study of fascism in Italy . . . it was to be a book in advocacy of freedom. In addition, he wanted to translate a number of obscure texts into Italian, texts which we published extracts from in No. 20 of Culmine under the title "For our publications". He was always in sympathy with the spirit characterising this magazine and made contributions to it under the pen-names Victor David, Armodio and V.D. In particular he used to send detailed letters which reflected the life of suffering in the boundless hell that is Italy.

"For all their sobriety, his writings were distinguished by an acumen that invited the reader to seek his pleasure in reading them.

"At this hour, grave with great events with a huge bearing upon the history of our movement, I cannot — and a lump rises in my throat — do other than recall the man in these columns which he so zealously helped to make more interesting and purposeful.

Essedi."

Feelings were running so high that even Benito Mussolini, in a gesture calculated to win the support of the Italian working class, telegrammed Governer Fuller urging him to commute the death sentences passed on the two anarchists.

The public rallies were large and stormy. In the Plaza del Congreso, the libertarians Alberto S. Bianchi and Horacio Badaracco burned a United States flag. They were arrested and an incredible trial for treason began. Whereupon both launched a hunger strike which lasted for 35 days (and "without the fruit juice and sips of buttermilk that distinguish today's hunger protests").

But the execution was not carried out. The two men who had spent seven years behind bars received a further postponement of twelve days. The execution was put off until 12.00 midnight on August 23.

Those twelve days were a time of ceaseless agitation and rioting workers. The police took a tougher line. Badaracco and Bianchi continued their hunger strikes. The autonomous groups organised work stoppages and demonstrations to protest at the actions of the US courts. The US *chargé d'affaires* placed an insertion in *La Nación* in which he tried to show that Sacco and Vanzetti were common criminals and that all the proprieties of the legal process had been observed.

Don Eduardo I. Santiago, chief of detectives in the Buenos Aires police, had assured journalists that everything was under control. Asked whether he feared an attempt on his own life, he sneered, "nothing is going to happen". The next night, (August 16 1927) a little past 10.00pm, the Almagro neighbourhood was startled by a most powerful explosion. A bomb which was described as "exceptionally powerful" had just exploded at 944 Rawson Street, at the luxurious home of Don Eduardo I. Santiago. Placed on a balcony leading into the drawing room, it had obviously been intended to kill Santiago, who had however retired to a neighbouring bedroom only minutes earlier. The furniture in the drawing room and in the hall had been completely destroyed and the balcony and windows reduced to smithereens. The contents of feather pillows lay strewn all about. The reporter from *La Nación* waxed poetical in his description, "feathers covered a chandelier like a coating of fine snow."

Wisely—the anarchists were to say afterwards—there would be no more declarations from Santiago. Indeed, subsequent inquiries were conducted by the head of the Political Bureau in person.

At last the fateful night of August 22 arrived. A huge multitude assembled in the cafes in the Avenida de Mayo awaiting the dreaded news. The anarchists met in the cafes in the Boedo district, their favourite meeting places. The crowd stood their ground until the dawn came, waiting for the early editions. Some, who had friends on the editorial boards were able to release the news early. Yes, they had

killed them, at 12.00 midnight on August 23, Sacco first then Vanzetti. Both men went proudly to their death with cries of "Long live Anarchy!".

Faces displayed a sense of outrage; there were tears of grief and a sense of helplessness. The incredible phenomenon spread all over the world: rarely had so many tears been shed, rarely had people reacted with such violence against the deaths of two men, two humble Italian immigrants charged with robbery and murder by one class while the other class exalted them as martyrs for the freedom of mankind.

Somewhere in this throng had to be the hunted Di Giovanni alongside the Scarfó brothers and other friends. Evidence of that is the letter which he sent one year later (by which time he was a fugitive hotly pursued by the police after his terrible attack on the Italian Consulate) to his beloved Josefina Scarfó, and which was dated pm, August 24 1928.

"I well remember how, a year ago we felt torment, threats, hope and fatigue. On the morning of the 24th (no, the 23rd to be more precise) I made my way home after a night of unachieved struggles. They had executed them—in dastardly fashion in a Charlestown cell—and everyone's heart shrank and his fists clenched. You—and our other female comrade—you wept as you learned the news. Ah, the beauty of the female heart, full of pure and celestial love! You wept and in your generous heart damned the evildoers, those cowards with their powers, and out of this tragedy you fortified your iconoclastic, rebel faith and purged your soul—already so pure—and from the hedges which line our libertarian pathways you harvested, hands full of all the flowers of a great redemption and clutched them to your breast with all the rapture of the 14 year old which you then were. Do you remember?

"Just then the struggle was raging in every corner of the globe. In Chicago, a twin spirit to your own raised a most beautiful monument to the heroism of young womanhood. Do you recall Aurora D'Angelo? She was beautiful like you. She was generous like you. She, like you, lovely child of anarchy, is scorned! Ah my sweet companion! Ah, my great love..!

"In the year since—nothing. The newspapers—theirs and ours alike—report nothing new. All of the heroic power of iconoclastic rebellion is resting in dreams and promises. I want to believe so! Because no one who has a heart that is fertile soil for generosity and solidarity can keep silent, or sleep, or squander himself in inactivity. The two martyrs in Boston have sowed the finest seeds of the season and have worked a highly fertile soil which cannot long delay in producing the ripened fruits of liberation.

"But this year, nothing. Tomorrow we shall see weeping and gnashing of teeth from the scribes and pharisees of the tired old anarchism of the puppet and operetta. But should some nameless hand assume the task of marking this blood-

stained date, this awful tragedy perpetrated on the flameless pyre, ah, why then, those same scribes and pharisees will hurl their crocodile anathemas beyond even the seventh ring of heaven. They always do this, they always act like disciples of Saint Ignatius Loyola. They do no more than walk—and falsely—in the footsteps of the most rancid and warped Jesuitism. . . "

That letter of August 24 1928, when Di Giovanni was already being violently attacked from the pages of *La Protesta* because of his individualist actions, broadens our understanding of him.

The news of the deaths of Sacco and Vanzetti broke on August 23 1927. On that day there was a general strike, organised by the labour centrals; bombs went off everywhere and there was a riot in the Avenue de Mayo, culminating in the burning of a tram.

But that is as far as it went. Once Sacco and Vanzetti were dead these activities faded until gradually they were but a memory, and perhaps a symbol, for some years more. Governor Fuller was right perhaps to give the order to kill them! He believed that the two anarchists were less dangerous dead than alive.

III. Error, cruelty and blind obstinacy

> In the eternal struggle against the State and its props, the anarchist who is fully alive to his function and his rebelliousness which arise out of the ideal which he professes and out of his conception of action, cannot very often foresee that the avalanche which he will shortly bring tumbling down the hillside will trap his neighbour's tail . . . this neighbour who is absorbed by contemplation of the heavens. Nor does he see that he is treading on the corns of another who insists on remaining inert, no matter what may be going on all around him. It is an inescapable part of the struggle that the anarchist does not purposely seek it out of mere whimsy, but that the note of violence crops up in his path as a result of a series of coincidences. The usual recriminations and talk about 'differences', and serenades to remorse, and nitpicking and usual abuse and disavowals . . . none of these can repair the inevitable. If this is the road we must take, we cannot do it sustained and fettered by some phoney unproductive sentimentalism without also setting obstacles in the path of what we seek to advance as the goal of energetic rebellion.
>
> Severino Di Giovanni—*Terrorism*

In the months that followed, Di Giovanni kept changing address. It is evident that at some point he had lost the means to produce bombs because it was only at the end of November that he sprang into action again.

And it was during these months that there intruded into his life a factor to which he was to commit himself with the same zeal and passion as to his ideals: love. That fourteen year old girl had brought something new into his life, a sentiment hitherto unknown to him. He was deeply fond of his wife, Teresina, but she was a good wife and nothing more . . . a gentle quiet woman, typical peasant stock. But he could not discuss his ideas with Teresina nor could she share his dreams. She had never asked or claimed anything of him; indeed, her life with him had been full of difficulties and she had known no ease since they had been forced to leave Italy. By contrast, the adolescent Josefina Scarfó with her fiery eyes and intelligent features bombarded him with questions about a thousand and one things, ever eager to learn more and unable to comprehend how the world could be against men of his sort who were totally committed to the struggle for freedom. She was precisely the sort of person that this twenty-six year old man had need of as a confidante, someone to support him in all of his struggles, disappointments, defeats and illusions.

Each of them burned with love of the other, but neither knew how to communicate it. Josefina, because of her inexperience; Severino because of a shyness which made him freeze in her presence. He was after all in the debt of her two brothers, Paulino and Alejandro, who had taken him into their home.

Even so, Di Giovanni needed this girl. He needed to see her and chat with her all the time. He was deeply in love, powerfully attracted and enchanted by the freshness, naivety and at the same time profundity of the girl.

He was a man of such temperament that he was only able to find peace with such a woman. Di Giovanni had many admirers among men but no friends. He was forever at odds with them. He had alienated Aldo Aguzzi, his mentor; he had quarreled with the men around *La Protesta* because he disagreed with their methods of action, and the same with the *La Antorcha* faction, accusing them outrightly of cowardice; he had even argued with Alejandro Scarfó. There was only one man with whom he was never to fall out . . . that was Paulino Scarfó, a solitary, introverted boy of few words but with an intense devotion to libertarian ideals which he would remain faithful to until he died at the hands of a firing squad.

Di Giovanni hesitated and tried on more than one occasion to shrug off his love for the teenage Josefina. But to no avail. Aside from his friendship with the Scarfó family, he was restrained by the fact that anarchists make a cult of having a private life which is beyond reproach. They disdain marriage as an institution and hold in contempt all moral and sexual prejudices, but anyone who gets entangled in amorous adventures is looked at askance, especially if their partner in the affair is scarcely more than an adolescent and, to boot, the sister of one's comrades. But Di Giovanni flew in the face of even anarchist prejudices. Gambling his life in an endless contest with society, risking himself day in and day out in the fabrication of explosives and using his spare time to compose leaflets and agitational periodicals, he still waited at the corner of the Estanislao Z. Zeballos Ladies' High School for the pupils to come out. And then he and his second year student would stroll together like just another couple of lovers.

Their relationship was shrouded in absolute secrecy. Not even the Scarfó brothers suspected. Paulino may have suspected something but he never said anything to his sister: he was too fond of her (and she was too strong a character) for him to attempt to prevent her. In any case he held Di Giovanni in such high esteem that anything he chose to do was all right with him.

When the net was about to close in on them, Di Giovanni fled to the Delta area.[3] But he soon had to flee from there too for the police were tipped off that—"Severino

[3] He was to be conducted there by Gino Gatti, an intelligent if taciturn fellow who was the real "logistical" genius of anarchist expropriation in Argentina.

Di Giovanni may be found in Tres Bocas (Arroyo Pajarita) in the estate known as De Marcé: every day he makes his way to the San Fernando canal at 7am or 7.30 and at 9.30 leaves by means of the Arroyo Pajarito ferry which drops him outside the Prefectura or just behind the railway track."

Despite such detailed information, the fugitive evaded capture. Meanwhile in the Scarfó home, the parents had told Paulino and Alejandro in no uncertain terms that Di Giovanni would have to go; since the raid on their home, the Scarfós had realised that their lodger was a dangerous man. Teresina was informed of their decision and she packed their things. Di Giovanni personally arranged the move with the carter Juan Rotti, a fellow Italian and anarchist. Using a cart belonging to the *La Familiar de Avellaneda* firm, Rotti ferried away the Di Giovanni's few pieces of furniture, clothing and books and took them to 3051 Gaona Street where the family had taken two basement rooms.

But the Di Giovanni family was to be there for scarcely two months. Severino suspected that his address would quickly be discovered and so, at the end of October 1927, again with the help of Juan Rotti he moved once more, this time to a small house at 1030 San Nicolas Street.

Severino's intuition had not misled him: only a few days passed before the police turned up at 3051 Gaona Street. The caretaker admitted that Di Giovanni had been staying there and had had many visitors, especially on Saturday nights. And that when those visitors had gone, it had been with the utmost circumspection.

Alejandro Scarfó had informed his parents that he was moving to Mendoza in search of work but they knew perfectly well that he was off to join Di Giovanni . . . that man who had such an influence on their three children. Sure enough Alejandro did not go to Mendoza but moved in with Di Giovanni in San Nicolas Street. One month later Paulino Scarfó joined them. The Two Scarfó boys were just eighteen and twenty years old.

Little by little, Severino Di Giovanni was gathering around him all the men of action of Argentinian anarchism—the men who wanted concrete action and were not content merely to hand out leaflets and deliver lectures.

During the months when he had been on the run, Di Giovanni had lost his bomb-making facilities, but by November 1927 he was back in action again avenging the deaths of Sacco and Vanzetti. He deliberately selected as his target the Combinados cigarette factory.

The owner of the factory had come up with a somewhat harebrained idea in his eagerness to make money. He wanted to market a new cheaper cigarette for workers and, for some reason, it occurred to him to adopt the brand-name 'Sacco and Vanzetti'. These were, of course, famous names but anarchists took a very dim view of the marketing scheme. On November 26 a bomb of the type customarily employed by Di Giovanni shook Señor Bernardo Gurevich's tobacco plant at 2279

Rivadavia Street. Damage was considerable and the same day the dim-witted entrepreneur decided to shelve his plans for 'Sacco and Vanzetti' cigarettes.

La Antorcha welcomed the bombing of the Combinados plant in these terms, "Through the mediation of communists and 'antifascists' the leftist Jewish owner of a tobacco plant in this city tried to obtain the agreement of Nicola Sacco's widow for the marketing of cigarettes under the brand name of Sacco and Vanzetti. However, things did not develop along the lines which this merchant intended. The grieving, dignified protests of Rosina Sacco were echoed by the protestations of Buenos Aires anarchists. The simple discovery that such an attempt was being made to make capital out of the two martyrs incited a just anarchist protest. On November 26, a powerful dynamite bomb destroyed the tobacco merchant's business. That bomb, which was only a warning, spelled it out clearly that one cannot capitalise on the sacrifice of our two fallen comrades."

But Di Giovanni did not agree with the praise offered by *La Antorcha*, nor did he care about the disdainful silence hitherto maintained by *La Protesta*. From the pages of *Culmine*, he continued to insist that the names of Sacco and Vanzetti should not be forgotten and that those names should be taken up as the banner of ultimate rebellion.

And so, on Saturday December 24 1927 he attempted what he believed to be a master stroke against two US banks. It was then that Severino Di Giovanni committed his first grievous mistake. At this point his tragedy began, and it would culminate in his attack upon the Italian Consulate. From then on, because of his refusal to concede his error, because of his obstinacy, because of the rebel in him, he was to drift away from the people and from his ideal which from the start (let no one deny this) had been the struggle for a better fairer, more free existence. Severino Di Giovanni was to see his rebellion through to the end and in this he showed integrity: unfortunately he also became cruel. Not because his was the heart of an assassin and not out of any bloodlust, but because he found himself trapped in a circle which he himself had traced out in his spontaneity and rage and from which he could discover no way out.

In a quarter of an hour the banks would all be closed. In those days they were open on Saturdays as well as week-days: on Saturdays they closed at noon. People were in especially good spirits. Christmas Eve was only a few hours away and everyone wanted to get away from work as early as possible and make for home.

Around this time of day, near the telephone booth in the huge hall of the San Martin branch of the City Bank—with its all-glass front—stood a certain Taboada, a man of a kind often seen in Buenos Aires: he hawked contraband goods and also collected lottery coupons. Today he had something special to sell—French champagne, which he was offering to the bank employees. He was about to leave

when, almost on the doorstep, he was called back by three tellers who wished to make a purchase. At that precise moment a stranger entered the bank, bearing a small suitcase. He walked over to the telephone booth, left his bag alongside it and stepping into the booth pretended to make a call. There was nobody near the booth itself: everyone was over by the counters. The stranger hung tip the receiver and left as casually as he entered. With this difference—he had left the suitcase on its side, not standing upright. The acid had already begun to work.

Poor Taboada retraced his footsteps along with the women employees in order to handle their orders more easily. He stopped by the telephone booth. As one of the women turned away to return to her work there was a scorching blast of flame followed by a deafening explosion. It ripped through the hall of the National City Bank like a tornado, tossing bodies, furniture, splinters and bank notes into the street. There was tremendous panic. So huge was the blast that for a moment the city centre was paralysed.

As the crowds raced towards the City Bank which now resounded with screams and shrieks and curses, either the same stranger, or another, walked into the Bank of Boston premises at the junction of Bartolomé Mitre Street and the Diagonal. He too carried a case which he would leave behind a desk while he filled out some bank slips. Five minutes later, flames erupted just as they had in the City Bank. But that was all. No explosion followed. Customers fled in terror. The premises were left empty. Curtains were hurriedly drawn and the city dwellers shivered in terror. The only noise was the whine of ambulances and fire sirens as they rushed to dig out bodies from beneath the debris. Experts were dogmatic: this was the largest explosion ever seen in Buenos Aires. 23 people had been injured. One died . . . Taboada who was blown to smithereens. A few hours later the death toll doubled when a nineteen year old bank clerk Magda Angélica Villar who was about to be married, also died. Her honeymoon in Córdoba had all been arranged.

Severino Di Giovanni had made his first mistake. And two innocent people were dead.

What was the reaction from Argentina's anarchists? *La Protesta* was thoroughly opposed to this latest act by the Italian anarchist. And *La Antorcha*? It is very hard to applaud an individual action which has cost the lives of innocents but *La Antorcha* was also reluctant to criticise a comrade who had, after all, risked so much and who did so whether rightly or wrongly, to vindicate the memory of Sacco and Vanzetti. *La Antorcha* did not applaud, although it did justify the outrage, describing it in its edition of January 6 1928 in these terms . . . "It was inevitable".

"Popular sentiment", it explains—"the sentiment of the proletarian masses which is able to form an opinion of the facts has been able to sum up in a single

phrase familiar to all, its opinion concerning the explosion at the City Bank. IT WAS INEVITABLE. That phrase, which encapsulates the opinions of the people, asserts their staunch belief that the passions of grief and hatred whipped up by the murder of Sacco and Vanzetti would not be dispelled by words, and it indicates the avenging intent of the explosion. And people are not wrong in this belief: the opinion, like the conviction is well founded. On the contrary, all who have denied, with a zest better reserved for other matters (a reference to *La Protesta*), that this act could possibly have had this intent, are deceiving themselves, or trying to. Or do they believe that the grief and indignation evoked by this horrendous tragedy has simply evaporated? Do they imagine that it was all ended by the electric shocks that 23rd August? Did not they expect those sparks to set those bombs alight?

"Men of little faith, men of feeble minds, who would offer your guidance to the people, listen to what the people tell you . . . "it was inevitable". Thus do the people assert their conviction and point to the meaning behind the action".[4]

Rodolfo González Pacheco also adopted a position on the outrage perpetrated by Di Giovanni, through the columns of *La Antorcha*. It was entitled, "The dead speak out".

"(. . .) No one, not even poor Taboada, for whom the blast must have been like a thunder-bolt, no one felt the blinding heat and the trembling inside that flared and shook us on the way back from prison when we heard of the bombs. Because for months past we had been feeling the acid eating through the cork partition. Because we had envisioned the forging of the steel casing, its being packed with explosives, and the fitting of the bolts. Because we had heard the passage of that unknown figure walking by with his cold suitcase in his hand, like a dead man, his tongue mute in his mouth. Because we had been expecting as much . . .

"Do you know what it is like to know that fate is on the move and marching closer? Can you imagine the anguished days and nights which that must mean for a man who loves his fellow men, even the most infamous of their number? No, you cannot know that, unless you are anarchists.

"But we know it! Haul us before the courts, you judges! Bury us in your dungeons, throw us at the mercy of your patriotic brutes. We know!

"We know that the dead talk. That beneath the grand words of Sacco and Vanzetti, of France and Debs, lay still greater words: that behind the sobs of Rosina Sacco and Luisa Vanzetti lay a sea of desolation: that the pain felt by Dante Sacco, the child, and Malatesta, the old man would be but a shadow stalking all working men. And we knew that, along with the filings clinging to the fingernails

[4] These lines were penned by the editor Alberto S. Bianchi, who died on May 11, 1969 at the age of 71 years.

of the smith and the cement staining the shirt of the bricklayer and the glint of their tools, a casing—only one?—was being shaped, and into it would be poured all the grief, anger and courage which you bourgeois had unleashed upon the world. And there was something else that we knew too: that some unknown had to pick it up and plant it where it would explode in front of your strong-boxes. Because he knows that your heads are filled with gold and he was going to force your ears open.

"No one, not even poor Taboada, for whom the blast must have been like a thunderbolt, no one felt the scorch on the face and the shaken innards which flared and shook us on the way back from the prison when we learned of the bombs. Because we knew and had been expecting as much. We knew that you bourgeois had set off the inevitable process and we had been expecting, waiting for just such inevitabilities as these.

"How fortunate you are, you who never know or anticipate a thing, can you comprehend the author of these acts now? Of course not. Even should you jail all the anarchists on earth, the one who did it, who may yet do it, who will do it, is the only one—and listen well to this!—the only one who will elude your grasp. He will pass among you carrying the invisible bomb in his hand, like a dead man, his mute tongue in his mouth. But dead men talk!"

The police were at a loss. Whereas every anarchist likely to go in for bombings had a dossier on him, they had not enough evidence to bring charges against any of them. Their only leads were a scorched suitcase and the bomb which failed to detonate. Naturally, throughout that Christmas they made the usual round up of anarchists who then spent the holiday in the cells. But the Political Bureau was not misled. To them only one man could have been responsible . . . Severino Di Giovanni. So they devoted all of their efforts to tracking him down.

Towards the end of January 1928 they had succeeded in locating his home. In this they had been assisted by an anonymous letter written in dubious Spanish and apparently penned by an Italian. There could be no doubt about it: the *Culmine* group contained a traitor.

On January 31, the Political Bureau discovered through an undercover agent that Di Giovanni was living at 1030 San Nicolas Street. Their report adds: "It is frequented by anarchist elements including a certain Scarfó and a brother in law of the same, by the name of José . . . " And then there follows a surprising paragraph which states baldly that Di Giovanni was a born agitator . . . "The subject Severino Di Giovanni frequents the barber's at 3537 Virgenes Street, making propaganda on behalf of his anarchist ideology among the customers."

They were closing in on him. But they held back from arresting him, hoping to catch him red-handed. The police were tired of arresting suspects whom the judge would later be obliged to set free for lack of evidence.

The following day, undercover agent José Larrosa of the Political Bureau reported, "We are informed that last night around 20.30 hours the subject Severino Di Giovanni made his way to 3834 Monte Egmont Street where he talked with the subject José Scarfó, a cabinetmaker by trade. After half an hour the two left together and made their way to a cafe at 1100 Oran Street where they had lengthy conversations with others who were there before them. At 1am Di Giovanni made his way home in the company of another subject who later said his farewells and made for Monte Egmont." One can see how Di Giovanni risked everything in order to exchange a few words with América Josefina, and how the Scarfó parents were powerless to prevent him from entering their home. Di Giovanni counted upon the friendship and sympathy of José Scarfó, another of Josefina's brothers, who was not yet an anarchist.

But his time was approaching. The next day (February 2) the undercover agent reports . . . "At 18.000 hours the subject Scarfó left 1030 San Nicolas Street. He looked all round to check that he was not being followed. I followed him as far as 3846 Monte Egmont Street where he remained until 21.00 hours before going to the cafe on the corner between Rivadavia and Esperanza. There he met Di Giovanni and they spent some time reading manuscripts."

The anarchists were building up a new campaign. Now that the agitation on behalf of Sacco and Vanzetti had ended, they were about to start a campaign on behalf of Radowitzky, the killer of Ramón Falcón, who had been incarcerated in Ushuaia penitentiary for eighteen years. *La Protesta* had initiated the written protests. *La Antorcha* was calling for the mobilisation of the working class. Meanwhile, through *Culmine*, Di Giovanni's people were insisting that individual actions were called for.

On February 4, agent Larrosa reported, "Di Giovanni continues to engage in discussions with these individuals. The postmaster in charge of the branch at 2500 Rivadavia states that the said Di Giovanni comes after 2pm daily to collect correspondence from abroad and from the capital itself, from his branch . . . "

At the time, Di Giovanni was receiving money from Italian anarchists in the United States and in France where they had powerful organisations, but he was also working on the presses of Viri and Company at 8224 Rivadavia, together with Paulino Scarfó.

Finally, on February 7 1928, the police grabbed Di Giovanni who was carrying a package, on the corner of Venezuela Street and La Plata Avenue. Di Giovanni was chatting with fellow-Italian Dionisio Di Giustini. It was 9am—they were only a few feet from the *La Antorcha* offices.

He was taken to the Central Police Department where he was invited to make a statement. He had to answer four questions: "Are you an advocate of strikes or of social revolution?" "Do you frequent places where anarchist ideas are professed?"

"Do you read newspapers of anarchistic views?" To all three of these he answered in the positive. To the last question, "Did you have any connection with the recent outrages?" he answered simply, "No!"

Under the Alvear government, they had little enough grounds on which to detain a man. They had no evidence against him, only suspicions. The chief of police ordered that he be released that very night. He took the view that it would be more profitable to tail him closely until he walked into a trap of his own making.

The confiscated package which Di Giovanni had been carrying at the moment of arrest contained leaflets worded as follows:

"18 YEARS IN USHUAIA!

And still he lives! Lungs rotten, throat wounded, little more than skin and bone. Yet still he lives!

Cold, hunger, punishment, and finally death—like a crow eating away at his heart these 18 years. And still he lives!

On whom does he wait? . . . How long must he wait? . . .

He waits for his freedom until the anarchists win it for him . . .

18 years in Ushuaia and still alive!

RADOWITZKY."

Since his address at San Nicolás had been discovered, Di Giovanni determined to move early in May, and with the help of the carter Rotti shifted his family and their few sticks of furniture to 250 Homero Street, in the Liniers quarter.

Along with Alejandro and Paulino Scarfó he rented two rooms in Villa Sarmiento, between Haedo and Ramos Mejía, in Cabildo Street, opposite a warehouse. The two rooms were used as an operational base where the copy of *Culmine* was prepared, along with leaflets for the campaign to have Radowitzky released from Ushuaia.

By this time Di Giovanni had parted company from his mentor, Aldo Aguzzi. Aguzzi (who had been held for questioning concerning the bomb attacks on the American banks), agreed with Di Giovanni's individual actions, but had told him that he ought to warn comrades beforehand so that they might take precautions against any consequent police action. Di Giovanni had rejected this criticism and had had a stormy exchange of words with the Italian theorist.[5]

[5] Donato Antonio Rizzo, former manager of *La Antorcha* told us of one episode which passed between Di Giovanni and Aguzzi in one of the offices of *La Antorcha. L'Adunata dei Refrattari* in the United States had received an anonymous note making certain charges against Di Giovanni. Without a shred of evidence, Di Giovanni, when he bumped into Aguzzi in the *La Antorcha* workshops, took him severely to task and accused him of having been the author of the unsigned denunciation. Aguzzi calmly retorted that this accusation was unwarranted, which only infuriated Di Giovanni who fell upon Aguzzi, grabbing him by the lapels and hurling him against a wall. Those present

Di Giovanni's close collaborators in the Italian group were José Romano (Ramé), Agostino Cremonesi and Julio Montagna, and, from the antorchista faction, the two Scarfó brothers, the Spaniard Gómez Oliver and Emilio Uriondo.

Di Giovanni was planning something spectacular to focus attention upon the Radowitzky case. He planned to send a parcel bomb to the governor of the Ushuaia penitentiary, Juan José Piccini, the man most despised by Argentine anarchists and widely believed to have inflicted barbarous torture on Radowitzky. Paulino Scarfó was entrusted with the task of sending the parcel to Piccini. It would travel aboard the cargo ship Pampa belonging to the Marine Ministry. According to the cargo manifest it was a food parcel containing six cans of Bau oil, four jars of olives, two provolones, two cheeses, etc. The alleged sender's name was J. Vechiarelli.

The parcel was rigged to explode when opened. But in Ushuaia, governor Piccini was tightly safeguarded. He lived and slept within view of a bodyguard and his food was tasted before being served up to him. When he saw the package that had been sent, he had it placed on adjacent waste-ground and had one of his men fire his rifle at it. As he had expected, the package exploded.

The assassination bid had failed as such but the news reached Buenos Aires and showed that some anarchists at least were determined to work for the release of Radowitzky.

Around this time, the liberal daily *L'Italia del Popolo* carried an exposé of the fact that Italo Capanni, Italian consul in Buenos Aires, was working hand in hand with the Political Bureau of the Federal Police, handing over lists of anarchists and antifascists of Italian nationality classified according to degree of dangerousness—and with the lists their histories from when they were resident in Italy.

From that moment on, Di Giovanni determined that consul Capanni would get his just desserts: Capanni was in any case reputed to be working directly for the Italian secret political police. Along with José Romano, Di Giovanni prepared his response down to the minutest details. The action was to be directed not only against Capanni but against his closest collaborator in the Italian community, Benjamin Mastronardi, president of the fascist subcommittee of the Boca, the area at the mouth of the La Plata River. And against Lieutenant Colonel Cesare Afeltra

---

rushed up to separate the pair and one of them, in order to shake Di Giovanni into reason, dealt him a ferocious punch which sent him reeling backwards. Severino turned around, startled by this attack, and, obviously stunned, asked . . . "Who was that?" There was a long silence. All those present froze. They all knew that Di Giovanni might do anything in the grip of his fury. When no answer was forthcoming he looked from one to another before turning on his heels and continuing with what he had been doing.

of the Italian army, who lived in the Almagro quarter. The Italian anarchists in the United States had urged their comrades to track down Afeltra and blow him to pieces: he was accused of torturing anarchists and antifascists in Italy and, such had been the furore about his activities that Mussolini had eventually advised him to leave Italian soil and settle in Argentina where he had built up a prosperous business producing biscuits.

Di Giovanni had read that on May 23 the newly arrived Italian Ambassador Count Martin Franklin was to visit for the first time the gleaming new Consulate at 475 Quintana Avenue which had just been opened. Di Giovanni took a bold risk: although he was well-known in the Consulate as a result of his involvement in the Colón Theatre disturbances (his photograph had been circulated to all of the staff and especially to the consulate guards), he went in person to the Quintana Avenue premises several days running in order to familiarize himself thoroughly with them. In this he had the help of his best friend, Ramé (José Romano).

Di Giovanni continued at all times to wear his black suit, and a black hat with a broad brim, and a black feather in the band. This was his only affectation. He never drank alcohol, or smoked, and ate only frugally. However his attire did attract a lot of attention, particularly given his attractive build.

His plan was to place a bomb alongside the offices of the consulate, to go off when the Ambassador was present.

Di Giovanni knew that this was the biggest gamble of his life, but he was confident that this action would have such consequences that news of it would reach Italy, and that it would mean a setback for the fascist regime. He was sure that its example would inspire other Italian antifascists, both inside Italy and beyond.

In Argentina the time was ripe. Bakers were involved in a serious dispute: two bakeries in Sarandí had been blown to smithereens and Rosario had been the scene of a general strike during which several people died. The dying days of tlte Alvear presidency were apparently seeing the break-down of the social peace which the country had enjoyed while he was in office.

Preparations were well in hand. The bombs were put together in a sort of farmhouse at Lomas del Mirador which had been rented by Paulino Scarfó. The explosives were stored there and the conspirators worked only under cover of darkness. On the morning of May 23 Di Giovanni and Ramé set out from the farmhouse carrying two suitcases. The blond man attired in black strode towards his tragic destiny. In all probability it never occurred to him that May 23rd was to mark the beginning of the end for him. That henceforth he would be implacably pursued, the quarry of a manhunt. The whole of bourgeois society with its defensive mechanism would hound him day after day, night after night.

His pursuers ever growing in numbers, their quarry ever more isolated and alone, until they finally brought him down and placed him up against a wall.

His hatred of fascists blinded him. He had witnessed the humiliating 'castor oil treatment' meted out to his comrades in Italy, a treatment more wounding than a clubbing, more degrading than mere imprisonment, shackles or deprivation of liberty. He had wept in impotence when the anarchist Capanelli had been beaten with iron knuckle-dusters by the squadristi of the Fascio until his eyes were pulp and he was blinded. He himself had had to leave Italy along with Teresina and their children because other Italians had seized control of his homeland and sought to do only as they saw fit with it. And now this young man of twenty-six years was good for one thing only—hatred. He poured all his energies into that emotion. Furthermore he had not forgotten the beating doled out to him in the Colón Theatre.

Having reconstructed events on the basis of the subsequent witness statements and those of the court, police and judicial records and of Di Giovanni's own statements before he died (he stated only that the bomb had been intended for consul Capanni) we can venture to say that things took place as follows. Di Giovanni entered the Consulate with his case, fully intending to get to the consul's office. To do that, he had to pass through a large hall set aside for the passport division where over 200 people rubbed shoulders, even though by that time the crowd had thinned out. In its new premises on the Quintana Avenue, the Italian consulate was a hive of activity. The Italian community in the city had been infected by a euphoria arising out of the achievements of the first few years of fascist rule.

Well-to-do Italians in Argentina had begun again to take a pride in their homeland. Once more they felt fully Italian. A flood 'back to the homeland' had begun. Special trips and facilities were laid on. Italians from *oltremare* (beyond the sea) returning to the homeland were exhibited, given special receptions and thoroughly fêted. Upon their return to Argentina, they told of the marvels of Mussolini and encouraged new groups to pay a visit to Italy. The Consulate was constantly bustling with people. At its peak, there were anything up to 600 people waiting to be dealt with. Entry was gained by means of a staircase which led to an extensive hall where desks were laid out. At the far end of this hall was another staircase leading to offices, among them the consul's own office, to which the public were denied admittance unless they had a special permit. There were about a dozen stewards and Italian plain clothes police who were quite obviously keeping an eye on visitors and who watched newcomers closely. In addition, a policeman stood guard by the doorway.

It would appear that Di Giovanni made several attempts to reach Capanni's office for he was seen walking around for a period of some minutes. But he had

overlooked one detail . . . how was he to reach the consul? Capanni was preparing to receive the ambassador and had no time for visitors. Di Giovanni must have sensed that he was under surveillance and had become suspect—not least because of the heavy suitcase that he was carrying—and decided to leave. We may be sure that he then exchanged a few words with Romano, who was waiting outside in a car: between them they decided that Romano should try again since he was less well known than Di Giovanni. Romano entered the consulate but, having been unable to make it to the consul's office and as time was running out—the bomb was due to go off at any moment—he dumped the case beside the entrance steps, some 20 yards away from the service desks.

At 11.42 the bomb exploded with catastrophic effects, the most deadly act of terrorism Argentina had experienced. Let us begin by describing the bomb. *La Nación*, going by police descriptions, said this about it . . .

. . . "the device planted was the same as the one in the National City Bank (contained inside a suitcase). An iron cylinder half a yard long with a detonator attached and all of the crevices filled with concrete. The insides were well packed with gelignite, dynamite and iron filings. On top of it all lay a glass tube divided into two sections, each section containing a different acid. The partition between was made of cork or cardboard through which both liquids ate until they met and the explosion was thus brought about. As long as the suitcase was carried on its side the liquids could not combine, but, once laid down flat the filtrage promptly began and detonation was a matter of seconds away."

That means that the terrorists had had to carry the device at great risk to their own lives because any sudden movement might have brought the liquids into contact with one another.

The explosion was to claim nine lives and injure a further 34 people. But the bare figures of victims cannot adequately convey what the inferno created by the explosion was like. *La Nación* was to write, "The explosion caused such a sudden expansion that nothing was left standing in the office. The counter, blown to smithereens, rained down upon the staff as did the rest of the fixtures and all of the people inside the devastated premises: the blast of gases given out by the detonation hurled them all to the same spot where they formed a shapeless heap. And down upon all the debris and bodies there immediately tumbled huge chunks of masonry from the partition walls and the rubble of the flat ceiling and splinters of glass in a terrifying scene. The explosion was simply phenomenal and created the impression that the whole building was collapsing . . . "

People fled in terror as a cloud of dust enveloped the Quintana Avenue. Bodies were dismembered beyond recognition.

Upon learning of the disaster, Don Marcelo T. Alvear the President, abandoned his luncheon and, accompanied by his Minister of War, General Agustín P. Justo

visited the scene to offer his condolences to consul Capanni. Only minutes after Alvear left again, one of the secretaries of Don Hipólito Yrigoyen arrived bearing a note in which that politician also offered condolences and expressed his regrets.

The outrage angered the entire nation. For whole days it was the sole topic of conversation. The perpetrators were disowned by everyone. To show that they were doing something, the police rounded up 400 anarchists. For effect, they also arrested the communist leaders Penelon and Rodolfo Ghioldi. There was widespread hysteria: one policeman arrested a bricklayer who had been reading a newspaper in Italian. The grounds? . . . "he seemed suspect".

Public hysteria only died away when, on May 25, at the River Plate stadium Victorio Campolo and the American Monty Munn met in a keenly awaited boxing match.

But Severino Di Giovanni's work was not finished with the planting of the bomb in the consulate. Once the suitcase had been planted, he and Ramé made for La Boca. They still had one more suitcase. Di Giovanni entered the pharmacy at Almirante Brown Street on Aristóbulo del Valle owned by Benjamin Mastronardi, chairman of the fascist subcommittee of La Boca. It was 12,30pm. Ramé stayed at the door. Di Giovanni carried the case in his right hand with his overcoat draped over it. Domingo Prego was serving behind the counter. The customer ordered some medicine from him. When Prego went into the store-room, the terrorist left his suitcase on the floor, pushed beneath a chair. He waited for his order to arrive, paid for it and left. But someone had been watching Di Giovanni's movements very closely.

On three occasions children were to cross his path in moments of danger. Little Dante Mastronardi had spotted the suitcase. And instead of running off to warn the strange young man in black that he had left something behind, he approached the item curiously as if Di Giovanni had been one of the three wise men and had left a mysterious gift for him. The child looked all around. No one was looking. Slowly, he opened the suitcase. Inside there was a package wrapped in pages from a newspaper. A glass tube was sticking out of it, a glorious tube that turned different colours and gleamed in the light of the sun. Dante took it between his fingers and drew it out whilst trying what the tube contained. Without realising it, he had just rendered the bomb harmless.

La Nación gave a technical outline of what had happened. "The cap of the tube was firmly screwed on and, in trying to remove it, its liquid contents spilled over the case and over the package inside in such a way that it did not make contact with what lay inside. This is why no explosion ensued, as would have happened had the the tube's contents come into contact with the components of the package placed inside the case. The acid dripped on to one corner of the suitcase which

burst into flames. The suitcase contained 50 sticks of gelignite, 32 five-inch nails, 11 charges each 3 inches long, one steel bolt, 2 steel screws and some cotton. The device contained a formidable amount of explosives and was about as powerful as the one used against the consulate."

When the flames flared, the child screamed; in ran his father followed by everyone else. Had the suitcase gone up not a trace would have remained of the fascist delegate's pharmacy.

The funeral arrangements for the people killed in the blast at the Italian consulate were impressive. There was an overnight vigil for the seven Italian dead at the premises of the Sociedad Pro-Schole at 2540 Independencia Street. Monsignor Fortunato Devoto and Monsignor Gustava J. Franceschi were in attendance. From there the coffins were borne to San Carlos for a solemn funeral. At the head of the procession was the coffin containing the remains of Father Zaninetti, escorted by several members of the Fascio. As the coffin passed a guard of honour composed of blackshirts, they gave the Roman salute. All of the coffins were carried by blackshirts and seamen from the Italian merchant vessels in the port in dress uniform. The high point of the proceedings came when president Alvear arrived in the company of Dona Regina Pacini. At that very moment a wealthy Italian businessman collapsed of a heart attack, rendering the spectacle even more dramatic. Behind Alvear came his ministers, Admiral Domeca Garcia and General Agustín P. Justo. Later, in La Chacarita cemetry, the members of the Fascio and of the *Nastro Azzuro* society unfurled their banners whilst the Fascio's delegate-general in Argentina, Romualdo Martelli bade farewell to the dead with these words:

"We salute the dead of today, our brothers; we salute them with the fascist funeral rite, without tears and lamentations; . . . we salute them with the rite of the strong whom death does not frighten, and we close ranks. Fascism is invincible!"

Then as the names of the dead were called one by one, the guard of honour replied with a Roman salute and a cry of . . . "Present!".

The first news concerning the possible perpetrators of the massacre at the consulate, was contradictory. *Crítica* stated that the fascists themselves had planted the bombs as a means of manufacturing martyrs. The other newspapers were simply bewildered. Only *La Nación* in an item covering two columns came anywhere near the truth when it wrote . . .

"A Band of Wicked Men. Yesterday, while inspecting the consulate site where the bomb exploded, a police official said that he suspected that the outrage might have been devised and perpetrated by members of a group which represents quite

a threat to the city. He stated that some months ago several individuals, ultra-anarchists of Italian nationality, broke away from the two anarchist tendencies extant in the capital viz, the *La Protesta* school, and *Los Antorchistas*. These individuals had continually been agitating for an ongoing action based on bombings. It seems that police have few details concerning these dangerous individuals whom, we can only suppose, they are searching for."

And indeed the police were searching for them. Or rather, searching for him. Consul Capanni was insistent that only one person could have been capable of the consulate bombing, namely, Severino Di Giovanni. When a police team arrived to search the house in San Nicolás street, the landlord informed them that the anarchist's family had moved out some two months previously. He hinted that their current address might be known to one Marcos Busliec resident at 950 Oran Street. Busliec claimed to know nothing but he seems, by the following day, to have decided to talk (or perhaps they had decided for him) . . . and he stated that Severino Di Giovanni was living at 250 Homero Street, appartment 1. That residence was promptly searched. By now Teresina was quite used to everything being turned upside down. Questioned as to the whereabouts of her husband, she answered that he had not been at home since May 22. In the course of its search, the police team discovered no fewer than 5,000 "anarchist and antifascist" books.

Meanwhile the whole police force in the capital was on Di Giovanni's tail. Di Giovanni, imperturbable, stuck to his plan which was to culminate in the bombing of the home of the Italian army's lieutenant colonel César Afeltra. He realised that the operation would be a high risk one because the homes of all Italian citizens of prominence were under guard. But the anarchist had a taste for defying the authorities and so, in the early morning of May 26—at 12.30am precisely—a tremendous explosion shook the Almagro quarter. The house where Afeltra lived at 351 La Plata Avenue was all but levelled by the blast. It was a very cold night and the bomber may have capitalised upon the fact that the policeman standing guard by Afeltra's door had gone for a few minutes to snatch a drink in a bar in Rivadavia Street.

Afeltra had been sitting reading when a blast shook the building and a deafening explosion hurled him out of his chair. "The bomb had demolished the main room; the metal shutters had disappeared and the ceiling crumbled to the floor", was how *La Nación* described the damage caused. "The devastation threatened to collapse the building."

Windows for three blocks around had been broken. An adjoining metal workshop had been literally wiped out. The devastation presented a horrifying picture. It was obvious that the terrorists were ready for anything and that unless they were stopped would level half the city.

Terror gripped the Italian community. *La Nación* reported that . . . "the families of notable Italians have been threatened and many of them have resolved to leave for Italy for a time."

Four of the best police inspectors were charged with investigating the bombings. They were Miguel A. Viancarlos, Camilo Racana, Alfredo Calandra and Enrique Larrosa. But it was deputy-inspector Garibotto, of the Political bureau who was already on the scent . . . he was sure that the bombers just had to be the Italian anarchists led by Severino Di Giovanni. And so, with the help of the Buenos Aires police he centred his investigation upon Berisso where the greatest concentration of Italian anarchists advocating the same sort of action as Di Giovanni was to be found. There, at a meeting, he arrested José Apugliesi, Francisco Mezzano, José Pelatelli, Antonio Botenelli, Vicente Pinelli and Genaro Pensa, all of them *Culmine* men. They were closely questioned but to no avail. They were all hardened types, nearly all bakery workers.

To prevent Di Giovanni attempting to flee the country, the police sent telegraph messages to Montevideo and Río de Janeiro, giving his description and asking that he might be arrested immediately.

But Di Giovanni had no intention of leaving the country. He had already fired his opening salvo and believed that a climate favourable to rebellion was forming in the country. In any case he now had a safe base for his activities, the explosives cache in the house he had rented in Lomas del Mirador.

IV. Anarcho-Banditry versus drawing-room anarchism

> Back down? No. Not even when—at the end of the road—with no means of escape, I find myself against the wall of death.
>
> Severino Di Giovanni, December 31 1929

Aside from all the damage caused, the bomb at the consulate had caused a rupture once and for all in the ranks of the anarchists in Buenos Aires. A rift appeared which was to split them even further and lead to a fight to the finish.

Only a few days after the bombing when no one—not even the police—had the slightest idea who might have been behind it, and when the press generally was quite perplexed (excepting the somewhat vague intimations given by *La Nación*) *La Protesta*, doyen of the anarchist press carried in its edition of May 26 an article entitled *School of Violence* in which it dissociated itself from the deed and went on to state that . . . "it is totally unconnected with the anarchist movement; there is not even any psychological or mental attachment with that movement". It continued, "terrorism is not anarchism even when a certain connection can be established between individual actions of a certain sort and some features of the avenging spirit which leads men of excitable temperament to take, on their own initiative, certain reprisals against the visible culprits of some collective crime. But we have a moral obligation to defend ourselves against the insinuations of the monied press concerning the attack on the Italian consulate, for their intention is to propagate the old nihilist myth and to attribute to libertarians as a whole methods of struggle which are more suited to our worst enemies . . . "

The writer went on to say of the attack on the consulate, "we cannot excuse it when, apart from its being anonymous, it is devoid of specific intent and indeed affected people quite extraneous to the thing which motivated and determined the attack."

On the other hand, *La Antorcha* was to adopt a more ambiguous stance and was to say again that the bombing could be anticipated and was a product of the violence cultivated by fascism. But it went on to take *La Protesta* to task, pointing out that the article it published served only to "raise an umbrella" and was aimed at the defence of *La Protesta*'s presses rather than their ideas.

Upon reading the *La Protesta* article, Severino Di Giovanni was overcome by irrepressible fury. He turned to Italian anarchists abroad to pass judgement upon his conduct and his attack upon the consulate. He got their total support. Even

Luigi Fabbri, the leading thinker of Italian anarchism after Malatesta, gave his approval to Di Giovanni's behaviour.

The argument with *La Protesta* was to persist for many months. The odd thing about all this was the fact that, in so ardently defending his terrorism in the public eye, Di Giovanni was incriminating himself in the eyes of the police. Not that this mattered much to him for he took pride in claiming responsibility for his actions. In the to and fro of their polemic *La Protesta* did not shrink from publishing an article on March 26 1929 entitled *Anarchism and Terrorism*, subtitled "Italian anarchist and terrorist acts in Argentina" (which means that the argument had become so heated that it no longer mattered to them that they were publicly naming the authors of those acts.) The article argued . . . "The outrages perpetrated at the Italian consulate, in the pharmacy at La Boca and elsewhere were, in terms of the way they were perpetrated and of the places chosen, entirely devoid of positive content. *La Protesta* made its opinion clear and was severely critical of the counterproductive mentality of the terrorist elements. The stance on the part of this paper aroused discontent in Italian circles abroad and many of the Italians charged us with being faint hearts, politickers and cowards and, as ever, there was no shortage of people ready to insinuate that there was something squalid in this campaign of *La Protesta*'s, in other words, that the police might not have been totally unconnected with it. But there were also comrades who considered the thing calmly, setting out their views without recourse to abuse and gross insults—people like Luigi Fabbri for instance, or V. de Andrea and others who confined themselves to attributing the stance we had adopted to our ignorance of the situation in Italy—of the terror used by the fascists against the Italian people—which must, in the nature of things, elicit by way of response the hatred of revolutionaries for that blood thirsty regime.

"In addition, D'Andrea while justifying acts of terrorism, tries to show them in a good light and depict them as indispensable to the revolutionary struggle and as a logical consequence of the anarchist ideal. He recommends that we adopt the methods of reactionaries in order to combat them. D'Andrea says, "But times have changed and events of recent years should alert us to the necessity, the urgent need for revolt and underground conspiracy so that we may repulse the enemy by turning his own weapons against him".

"We—and here the people involved in *La Protesta* are expressing their own viewpoint—are anarchists not because we hate but, because we love life. Man being by nature a sociable creature, we anarchists struggle to recover the right of each individual to do what he would with his life, that is to say, to overthrow today's society and introduce an anarchist society which will offer more guarantees to the natural development of mankind. Given that murder is anti-human and

anti-natural, we cannot adopt it as a method of struggle because to do so would be absurd and a violation of the humanitarian principles of anarchism."

What this amounts to is that two schools of thought had emerged. There were those who wanted to achieve complete liberty by any means necessary not excluding political crime and terror; and there were the others who sought to achieve it by means of love and reason. Both of these ambitions are utopian.

The two positions were products of different circumstances. The Italian anarchists were suffering merciless persecution, torture, exile, loss of homeland and roots; on the other hand, the Argentinian anarchists, under Yrigoyen and Alvear had (with odd exceptions) enjoyed peace and tranquility, absolute press freedom and freedom of association, interrupted only by an occasional police raid which was of assistance in justifying their revolutionary anti-bourgeois positions.

Justified by these anarchist theoreticians, Di Giovanni was to maintain his campaign of terror to the death. And for a second time it was a child that was to undo his plans.

It had taken a lot of risk and lots of time for him to accumulate the explosives cache in Lomas del Mirador, at 628 Progresso Street. He had spent all of the money sent him by Italian anarchists in the United States on those explosives. On May 31—scarcely a week after the bombing of the consulate—young Eugenio Tomé was cleaning out his rabbit-hutch in his home at 7651 Alberdi Street when one of his pet rabbits escaped. The creature disappeared over the fields.

Crítica gives a good description of what Lomas del Mirador was like at that time. "It is a small village located in the middle of a marshland: crops and stone cairns mark the limits of the tarmac road. The houses are sparse and isolated one from another. The settlement is halfway between a suburb and a country hamlet."

The runaway rabbit went to ground at 628 Progresso Street. The child peeped inside but there seemed to be no one at home. There was not a sound. Eugenio clambered over the adobe wall in search of his pet. There it was, alongside the door to the kitchen. The boy picked the rabbit up but consumed by curiosity started to peek through the windows of the house. They were covered by newspaper stuck over the glass. The house seemed deserted. The boy's curiosity grew. He tried the door to the kitchen and it opened before him. When it was half way open there was a searing burst of flames and an explosion. The boy fled in terror. The neighbours rushed into the streets, highly alarmed, and notified the small police detachment in charge of the area. When the police tried the front door, they caused a second explosion. The special services squad of Buenos Aires police was sent for: they uncovered a cache of explosive materials—gelignite, kegs of black powder, flasks of nitric acid and sulphuric acid, vials of potassium chlorate, etc. and five bombs set up in series, primed to detonate whenever either of the doors was opened. When they were not at their work inside, the inhabitants

would set this booby trap to prevent busybodies or policemen discovering their cache of explosives. According to the experts, this system failed on account of the excessive humidity in the house since the more powerful bombs were down in the cellars. Had the booby-trap worked, the whole house would have been blown to smithereens.

The owner of the property, Doña Ernesta de Reynoso stated that the premises had been leased by a tall, thin young man acting for a Señor Manuel Iglesias who had been supposed to be arriving from Spain. The young man—he was later identified from photographs as Paulino Scarfó—paid three months' rent in advance, a total of 135 pesos.

The doors and windows of the house at Lomas del Mirador were stained with acid and bore scorch marks, indicating that the tenants had been experimenting and making bombs there.[6]

The police connected the explosives cache with the bombs at the Consulate, the pharmacy and Afeltra's home. Days passed and the bombers were still at large. *Crítica* poked fun at the police with a headline which read, "Another rabbit needed to shed light on the bombings."

Two days later, under mounting pressure, inspector Garibotto decided to make public his suspicions: the chief suspect was the Italian anarchist Severino Di Giovanni and his picture was issued to all of the nation's leading newspapers and to all police forces in S. America. Day after day the name of Di Giovanni cropped up again and it became even harder for him to shake off the net that was closing in on him. Especially since his own group contained a police informer in whom Di Giovanni would continue to trust, suspecting nothing of his treachery. Police received an anonymous tip-off that Di Giovanni was hiding out in the Villa Sarmiento house and that it had been Paulino Scarfó who sent that deadly package to Ushuaia—if proof were needed, said the informant, one had only to compare Paulino's handwriting with the registration slip left with the Marine ministry.

The handwriting was compared and indeed the writing on the slip did tally with the lettering in Paulino Scarfó's signature.

But even if the police had a lot of collaborators, so did Di Giovanni. His help came mainly from the bakery workers of Morón, two of whose leaders, José Apugliesi and Pedro Aguirre harboured him for a number of days. Di Giovanni

[6] One of the busiest of the experimenters there was the anarchist Francisco Barbieri, known to the members of Di Giovanni's group as 'Chico the professor'. Barbieri subsequently fought in the Spanish civil war and was shot by the communists along with the renowned Italian anarchist Camilo Berneri in Barcelona.

used that time to instruct them in the production of bombs. Experience which they would later put to work in attacks against bakery vans in Morón during the bakers' strike.

Practically every day, police searched the Scarfó family home in Monte Egmont Street and, having discovered the Di Giovanni family residence in Homero Street, they kept watch on it around the clock. The minutest detail was noted. "8.6.28: the Di Giovanni home was watched; at 12.50 the younger daughter left and made her way to school at 5143 Cajaraville Street. She returned home at 16.20" . . . "9.6.28: today Di Giovanni's daughter did not go to school" . . . "26.6.28: Di Giovanni's daughter did not attend school as she normally does each day but spent her time strolling in the vicinity with others of her age".

In June and July the police received the following 'reliable' news "concerning Di Giovanni's whereabouts". He was in Ensenada, or in Alemania Street, (no number given) in the home of anarchist Domingo Parisi; or in Bernal in the home of anarchist Carlos Posse; or in Montevideo in the home of anarchist Héctor Menini at 474 Julio Herrera y Obes Street; or in Nagoli (San Luis) in José Pinelli's house; or in Castex (La Pampa); he set off on 18 July from San Fernando for El Carmelo; he was in Bahía Blanca, at 124 Maipú Street; Villa Mitre where he was publishing the anarchist paper *Brazo y Cerebro*[7]; or he was in Fray Bentos in Uruguay. The Buenos Aires police reported that Di Giovanni had been taken out to the islands of the Delta from San Fernando by lighterman Antonio Bustos Duarte. The manager of the Hotel del Globo at 1579 Colón Street in Montevideo and two bell-boys recognised Di Giovanni from a photograph as the man who had occupied room 46. Or Di Giovanni had been taken aboard the launch *Irene Nulda* belonging to Vicente Castro to the San Fernando islands and thence to El Carmelo where he stayed in the home of Camilo Franvis; or he was in Montevideo at 1340 San José Street in the home of Francisco Cancelo; or was at the Hotel Victoria in Córdoba; or was staying with the grocer Angel Ferlaudo in the basement of 43 Esquiú Street on the corner of Charcas, Córdoba; or was sleeping in a guesthouse at the junction of the del Trabajo and General Paz Avenues (in Buenos Aires); or was picking up his mail in the village of General Paz (in Córdoba); or was living in the home of María Massa at 296 Tablada Street, Córdoba, under her protection having set up home with her; or he was living in the home of the farm labourer Masculli, Teresina's brother in Morón; or that he had been spotted at 5am in the Delta Area. From a photograph, all of the staff of the Czechoslovak consulate at

[7] G. Cuadrado Hernandez—a journalist on the staff of *La Razon* and who was working for *Brazo y Cerebro* around this time as an editor has pointed out to us that Di Giovanni was never at any time in Bahia Blanca. Obviously the police were misinformed or capitalised on the name Di Giovanni in order to search and ferret around in any place where anarchism was suspected.

1456 Victoria Street in Buenos Aires, recognized Di Giovanni as the man who applied for an entry visa for Czechoslovakia. The General Inspectorate of Police in Mexico reported that Di Giovanni had fled to the United States or was still living in a border settlement in California; and so on and so forth.

Investigating all these reports cost the police an enormous amount of effort. But Severino Di Giovanni was nowhere to be found. They had to come up with some results . . . public opinion demanded it, as did the authorities. It had to be remembered that there was a friendly government—the Italian government—involved and its diplomatic representatives were very keen to see the bombers arrested.

The only positive thing that turned up was the discovery that Di Giovanni used the curious alias of Nivangio Donisvere (an anagram of his own name) and had documents made out to this name as well as in the name of one Pascual Di Giorgio.

And the surveillance on the Di Giovanni family home had produced results also: Teresina and the children were receiving assistance from the Prisoners' Aid Committee of the Autonomous Syndicates[8] which handed over 150 pesos to them on July 2 and a further 50 pesos on July 16: also on July 16 a removal van from *La Familiar* of Avellaneda arrived at their home and transported the Di Giovanni family and their few bits of furniture to 2522 Curapaligüe Street, home of Valentín Alsina.

[8] The men entrusted with delivery of the money were José Vela and José Nutti. The latter, a taxi driver was arrested in January 1931 for membership of Tamayo Gavilan's group. He was sentenced to 6 years for 'illicit association'—this being a device by means of which the courts under Uriburu and Justo rid themselves of troublesome anarchists when they did not have reliable enough evidence to convict. Nutti was sent to Ushuaia where he twice attempted suicide. He could not bear the continuous beatings doled out by the warders nor the arduous labour of carrying tree trunks on his shoulders through snow and frost. But the assistance and constant advice of the other anarchist prisoners, Emilio Uriondo among them, gave him courage and made him turn his back on suicide attempts. Having served his sentence, he went back to driving his taxi in the Parque Patricios area.

V. The anarchist, love and the woman

> . . . to lose ourselves far, far away in the greenery . . . to walk arm in arm at dawn towards an intangible and unattainable horizon, forever as one, forever tightly linked like two ivy plants each drawing nourishment from the other, and to sing the heroic rhapsody of a life of difficulty . . .
>
> S. Di Giovanni to 'Fina', September 10 1928

After two months of constantly being on the run, Di Giovanni returned to Buenos Aires, drawn there by his passion for the fifteen year old América Josefina Scarfó. Whenever he couldn't see her he wrote her as many as three letters each day. And these letters had to pass through the hands of two or three intermediaries before they reached their destination. Almost all of these go-betweens firmly believed that they bore messages relating to the struggle they never suspected that what they carried were mere love letters. Meetings between the two lovers were arranged with much greater difficulty. He was sought by the police, while she, being only a teenager, was closely watched by her parents as well as by the police who kept the Scarfó house under surveillance in the hope of arresting her brothers Paulino and Alejandro..

Josefina—or Fina as everyone knew her—acted with prudence and intelligence in this thoroughly discouraging situation. She had allies in trying to break out of the circle—there was the school she attended (she was in her third year at the high school section of the Estanislao S. Zeballos Normal School), and she could keep certain of her escapades from her parents by alleging school reasons; then there was her fellow student Elena Serra, the girlfriend of her fugitive brother Alejandro—a reference to Elena could explain away her leaving home after school hours; and there was the help (unknown to her parents) from her brother José and sister Santa, given in the belief that in helping Di Giovanni they were also helping to protect their fugitive brothers. Despite the irregular, unstable circumstances in which she found herself, Fina was a brilliant student.

Nothing affords us such an intimate glimpse of the personality of Severino Di Giovanni as his love letters. They show us an unsuspected poetic side to him.

The words which this man of such awesome strength and impulses wrote to his beloved, little more than a child, were at all times simple, unmistakably romantic and, we might add perhaps, should only be read in the original Italian. But, even so, we shall give a few excerpts in English:

". . . Sunday August 19 1928. My friend: My whole body is on fire. Your touch has filled me with all sorts of delights. Never before have I drunk so deeply of the elixirs of life as over these past long days. Before, I lived the restless life of a Tantalus and now, today, this eternal today which has brought us together as one—I have tasted, though am not yet sated with, all of the harmony of love so dear to a Shelley or a Georges Sand. I told you, in that generous embrace, how much I loved you and now I want to tell you how much I will love you. Because the stuff of intellect which can give substance to all of the chosen ideals of human existence will be our most expert guide in the resolution of our problems. And I must tell you with all of the sincerity of a friend, a lover and a companion, that our union will be beautiful and long-lived, a source of delight and the whole range of sentiments: it will be great and last through all eternity. And when I speak of eternity (all that the heart has desired, enjoyed and loved is eternal) I refer to the timelessness of love. For love never dies. The love which has germinated far from vice and prejudice is a thing of purity and its purity defies contamination. And what is beyond contamination belongs to the eternal."

In another paragraph, he writes, "I should like to write in your language (Fina always wrote to him in Spanish) in order to serenade you always with the sweet song of my soul and to have you understand the palpitations pounding in my heart and the delicate motions of my intellect which, stirred by you, will never be able to write 'finis' to your elegy. But on the other hand, I—who believe that my love for you is requited with all of the ardour of your still budding youth, I have read it in your dark eyes so many times—am content to know that, before you can understand them properly these lines of mine will have to be read and reread by you."

Then he urges her—"you have no time to waste on writing to me, for you should be applying yourself to your studies", and closes with this farewell—"kiss me as I kiss you: feel for me the same fondness that I feel for you and know that I think of you always, always, always. You are the heavenly angel who walks by my side through all of the sad and happy hours of my defiant and rebellious life. With you now and always."

The lovers lived like this for two years, always collecting new enemies and losing friends because the danger was growing and the noose was silently tightening with each day that passed. Only their love and their passion could have afforded them a taste of a different world. Let us look, for instance, at this letter of September 8 1928.

"My companion: as ever I waited for you today. It's six o'clock, you won't be coming now. Tomorrow is Sunday, another day without you. Monday, who knows? Yet I'd like to see you, be alone with you, tell you so many beautiful things, talk together, laugh a little, to embrace each other as two lovers, ask each other

questions, to dream with open eyes, to worry about the future, remember the past and embrace our present. Oh how beautiful it is to spend hours together now! Alone! Alone! Alone . . . ! A friend has made me a present of a very beautiful edition of Dante's Comedy with illustrations and notes. How I should like to read it with you! Those exquisite passages about Francesca da Rimini in the arms of her Paolo whilst the storms of Hell struggle vainly to separate them . . . vainly because of the grip exercised by their love, by everyone's love. And the delicious engravings of Gustave Doré who has portrayed them in the fullest raptures of their love, in that frenzy which overreaches human sensibilities, beyond tragedy, beyond life itself . . . !

"How lovely it would be to read these pages with you . . . the two of us close together, together . . . thus, in our tight embrace I would be able to kiss you from time to time!

But you will come to me my beautiful companion. I am certain that you will come and that certainty makes me so happy, how can I express it? . . . so happy that it might well have been yourself. And when you do come we shall read and examine and select not just the words of the Comedy but also the words, the more beautiful, more exquisite, more pertinently our words—and thus more ardent words—of our immeasurable love".

But Severino Di Giovanni's time was not merely spent in running from the law and on his affairs of the heart. At the beginning of October 1928 a seaman's strike erupted in the port of Buenos Aires, directed against the Nicolas Mihanovich shipping line. The dispute was a very bitter one and neither side would give an inch. The dispute had arisen out of the fact that the crew of the steamship *Bruselas* had been forced off the ship. Juan Villalba, captain of the *Apipé* and brother of the master of the *Bruselas* promptly made common cause with him and disembarked from his vessel; his crew followed him out of solidarity. The Maritime Workers' Federation immediately called a strike.

Days passed and Mihanovich refused to give way: in fact he pompously announced the imminent departure of his ships. The first to leave port was to be the *Apipé* which managed to load up and take on a crew furnished by the harbour authorities. After October 11 the *Apipé* was ready to leave harbour. The striking seamen regarded this as a gauntlet flung down to them and they made ready to hit back . . . and hard.

Things were very difficult. Access roads leading to the dockside were strictly guarded and patrolled. No one could gain access to any ship without a special permit from the authorities and the shipowner's company. Furthermore, each ship had its own special guard, especially the *Apipé* being made ready to leave port. How was she to be stopped? Somebody on the strike committee or in

the most determined groups must have come up with the answer: Severino Di Giovanni.

On Sunday October 14 1928 a man dressed in elegant black with a broad brimmed hat of the same colour approached the watchman positioned at El Riachuelo opposite Gaboto Street. He was carrying an ordinary brown suitcase. He walked stern-faced with a spring in his step, and, with scarcely a hesitation he blurted out in Italian, "Mihanovich's engineer. I have a crucial part for the engines of the *Apipé*. The ship must pull out this evening, come what may."

At this point two groups of workmen appeared only thirty paces away along Gaboto Street and set about one another, exchanging blows and insults. The watchman's attention wandered from the newcomer as he concentrated on the scuffle nearby. The stranger in black strode on unhesitatingly and came face to face with a special watch on the ship. He repeated what he had said to his predecessor, but this time he added, "The other watchman has my entry permit . . . "

Things seemed to have been well worked out in advance, for at that point the brawl became more serious and gunfire was heard. Whistles blew and men began rushing around. The watchman signaled to the stranger to stay where he was because there was no time now to check his papers. But the man in black slipped aboard just as the brawlers vanished, apparently none the worse for wear and having suffered no gunshot wounds.

Calm returned. Nothing had come of the whole business. The watchman even forgot that he had allowed a stranger in black to get aboard.

Scarcely a few minutes later, the watchman in the offices of Mihanovich received an anonymous telephone call . . . "A bomb has just been planted in the bows of the *Apipé*". The fellow called the police. The bows were thoroughly searched after the evacuation of the ship had been ordered. Nothing was found. A hoax?

A few minutes later a second telephone call . . . "the bomb was placed on the poop deck." A disbelieving clerk passed this message on to the police who reluctantly and perfunctorily checked the poop, since they were by now convinced that someone was pulling their legs. This time something was found: The bomb was there, in the bilges alongside the engine room. Precisely where it would ensure that the whole ship would go up. Immediately the bilges were flooded to a depth of 30 centimetres so that the bomb was completely covered.

The bomb was in a can which the stranger had apparently brought in his case. On the starboard of the ship there was a catwalk: the stranger in black had fled along that way and possibly—almost certainly in fact—had been picked up by a boat which had drawn alongside unnoticed.

That day's edition of *La Nación* reported, "Assistant inspector Garibotto of the Political Bureau removed the contents of the cannister which had been wrapped with sacking and tightly bound up with wire and rope. Then he proceeded to

undo the bindings and uncovered a cubic shaped box made of copper some 15 centimetres high and weighing approximately 12 kilograms (the official report from Buenos Aires arsenal established that the cannister weighed 29.44 kilos and had a capacity of 5.1 cubic centimetres). This box, on one of its faces, had a screw top. When unscrewed it revealed a small bottle positioned up-side down and capped with a cork that rested on a base of metal filings. As is the case with explosive devices of this nature, the bottle contained a corrosive acid which had already eaten through the cork; it only remained for the metal filings to suffer the same fate and the other elements in the device would have come in contact and there would have been an explosion, the effects of which would have been incalculable given its enormous size as well as the destructive potential of its component elements. Its impact would have been felt not just aboard the *Apipé*, which would have been destroyed, but also on board neighbouring vessels." The bomb contained 2 kilos and a half of gelignite, gunpowder and numerous bolts and rivets. The bronze casing was 3 centimetres thick and offered tremendous resistance to the powerful charge which it contained. The explosion had been averted only by a matter of minutes, perhaps of seconds.

As assistant inspector Garibotto was later to explain, the device was of extremely delicate manufacture on account of its being so dangerous that, "in 90% of cases explosion is unpredictable". It was also all but untransportable, given its weight. And he closed his remarks to the press thus: "there is only one man in Buenos Aires who could have made it and placed it where it was placed . . . Severino Di Giovanni . . . "

What still had not been cleared up was the question of whether the attack failed because of treachery on the part of one of his companions or whether it was Severino Di Giovanni himself. He was always a great believer in the efficiency of the devices he put together and liked to make his attacks complicated to cause even greater sensation. Once the police team were on board ship, the explosion would kill them and therefore strike public opinion and the authorities with greater impact. The truth might be either of these. There is no way of establishing which, some forty years on. We only know that in his final statement to police before his death, Di Giovanni claimed to have been alone in the bombing of the *Apipé* and that the Maritime Workers' Federation had had nothing to do with it.

Just one day after almost having performed this incredible feat of terrorism Severino Di Giovanni wrote to his América Josefina Scarfó, "My sweet hope, I searched for you and thought of you, you filled all my thoughts. I could not find you. You—last Saturday—were far from my danger. Knowing nothing of my sadness you may well laugh, laugh gaily at this love of ours which had to make its way with the joyous wings of the most beautiful delights. But I was not laughing

(except when my thoughts turned to you); I suffered amid the tempestuous crisis of the everyday mishaps which represent the lot of the persecuted."

Then he goes on to tell her how he sought her at the home of her friend Elena and, from there, in many other places, but to no avail. It seems incredible that this man should have taken the risk of frequenting the places where he was most closely pursued, and the day after the attempted bombing of the *Apipé* at that. But, in the same letter to Fina, he tells how he had gone to pay a visit to his wife, Teresina, in the home of Valentin Alsina. " . . . I saw our flowers (their children) and kissed them. But not for a moment could I laugh. Our good friend (his habitual description of Teresina) noticed that I was troubled: But I told her nothing. Why mention it to her? Could she have offered me consolation? She is so simple and so good that she will never be able to comprehend how to spread soothing balm upon deep and bleeding wounds. She knows only how to weep. And I have a duty to her not to make her weep. She has suffered so much that to heap new suffering upon her shoulders would be a crime. I have made her a promise that, one of these days, I shall return, with you, to visit her again. And she was content with that."

Teresina did not even suspect any amorous connection between her Severino and Fina. She was very fond of the Scarfó girl who, when the Di Giovannis had lived with the Scarfós, used to help her look after the children, taught them some lessons and was kind to them. She knew only that Fina was of the same persuasion as her husband, and that was enough. In any case, with Teresina anything her husband did was fine by her although he acknowledged only one restraint—his own feelings! Thus, some ten days later, he was to write to Fina, "I love you so much! I love my children so much! You cannot refuse to make me and my children happy. You who are so good and who speak with the divine voice of the angels."

Noticeable in Di Giovanni was the pronounced influence of Nietzsche (in searching through his library in Burzaco, police were to discover printed posters displayed on the walls and bearing quotations from the author of *Also sprach Zarathustra*). For instance in a letter of October 22 1928 he writes, "Oh, how many are the problems that crop up along the pathway of my young life, beset by thousands of winds of evil. Even so, the angel in my head has told me so very many times that only in evil is there life. And I live my life to the full. The sense of my existence has been lost in that . . . in that evil? Evil makes me love the purist of angels. Do I perhaps do evil? But is that my guide? In evil lies the highest affirmation of life. And by being evil, am I mistaken? Oh, problem from the unknown, why do you defy solution?"

VI. The Bandits

> He who has not the wherewithal to live should neither recognise nor respect the property of others since the principles of social contract have been infringed to his detriment.
>
> Johann Gottlieb Fichte

(A quotation found in Severino Di Giovanni's desk in Burzaco)

On October 12 1928 Hípolito Yrigoyen was returned to the Casa Rosada. He had come back from opposition to win election after election. On October 12 1928 the people greeted him like an idol. There was genuine popular rejoicing.

The anarchists knew that Yrigoyen was no enemy of theirs. They would never forgive him for the Tragic Week or the Patagonian affair, but at the same time they knew that the best way to keep him in line was to apply a little pressure. And this they did from his first day in office, on Radowitzky's behalf. Radowitzky had spent some nineteen years in Ushuaia. That October the 'Free Radowitzky' campaign was launched afresh. Anarchists of every school cried, "Freedom for Radowitzky". The *La Antorcha* people set up a Freedom for Radowitzky Committee which scheduled meetings, activities and a general strike. They wanted to remind Yrigoyen of what he had said while running for president in 1916, when he promised anarchists that the imprisoned Russian would receive a pardon if he was elected. He was unable to deliver that pardon because he was overwhelmed by highly problematical social disturbances. But would he be able to deliver now? But now it was, if anything, even more difficult. The Army stood ready in the wings.

Di Giovanni was active in the campaign on behalf of Radowitzky and, of course, his plan was what it had been earlier in connection with the Sacco and Vanzetti affair—he believed that rallies and speeches achieved nothing and that direct action was called for.

But that required some groundwork. And in his circumstances, as a fugitive, forever changing abode, that was no easy matter for him. Then he made a trip to Montevideo and contacted the Roscigna group and the brothers Moretti (this pair had played an active role in the Tragic Week: Roscigna was a metalworkers' leader, an intelligent man of whom we spoke earlier).

Here we must pause for a moment for it was at this point that Di Giovanni totally involved himself in the 'anarchism of expropriation', that anarchism which justifies crime provided that it is crime against the bourgeoisie. Robbery and

theft—the argument runs—are permitted because they are one way of seizing back the wealth which the bourgeoisie extracts with more refined methods from the working class. The wealth thus obtained (or as the expropriators put it, 'reconquered') by means of robbery or theft is to be placed at the service of the cause, and used towards the upkeep of prisoners' families and spreading anarchist ideas.

Whereas this school of thought had had its predecessors in Argentina (as for instance the robbery of Perazzo by anarchists Vladimirovich and Babby in 1919), it really took off as a result of the activities of the Spanish anarchists Francisco Ascaso and Buenaventura Durruti, two truly legendary figures who, finding themselves in need of the 6,000,000 pesetas required by a Spanish judge for the release of 126 of their comrades, launched a series of bank robberies which began in Spain with raids on the Bank of Catalonia, then, moved to Mexico and the S. American Pacific countries. They based themselves in Chile where they made a fine haul, then went to Argentina where they robbed the Bank of San Martin (with Roscigna's help), crossed the La Plata to Montevideo and there carried out another successful robbery before returning to Europe. The whole escapade was an epic of courage and daring.

Such folk were able to extract themselves from even the most difficult situations calmly and cold-bloodedly. On one occasion, Ascaso was cornered in a café by a squad of Spanish police. There was no way of escaping. Not that he gave himself up. With a pistol in each hand he shot his way out, gunning down seven policemen and getting clean away.

These feats made a lasting impression upon Argentinian anarchists, especially among the younger ones. Furthermore, when Durruti and Ascaso, along with Jover were arrested in France, Argentina and Spain immediately requested their extradition. Whereupon a worldwide campaign began to defeat those extradition requests, and for many a month the three names held the front pages of the anarchist press in Argentina. Years later, Buenaventura Durruti was to become one of the most legendary of the commanders of the libertarian troops in the Spanish civil war. And the war was to lead to his death as it had to that of Francisco Ascaso before him.

The first great coup organised by the Argentinian anarchist expropriators following Ascaso and Durruti's 'tour' of the continent was carried out by Miguel Arcangel Roscigna and the Moretti brothers against paymasters at the Rawson Hospital in October 1927. A gun battle ensued and a policeman was killed. The anarchists made a fine haul and withdrew to Uruguay. Naturally, the Argentinian police never wearied of attributing the robbery to Di Giovanni when in fact he had never accompanied Roscigna since, paradoxically enough, Roscigna remained loyal to *La Protesta* (i.e. he was a *protestista* and not an *antorchista*) although he acted on his own initiative. *La Protesta* always spoke of Roscigna as a good

comrade turned to crime by the example and influence of Ascaso and Durruti. He was criticised, certainly, but much more mildly than Di Giovanni for whom Lopez Arango and Abad de Santillán had developed an undying hatred.

In Montevideo the Moretti brothers chose to ignore Roscigna's advice and successfully brought off another hold-up at the Messina bureau de change. Later they were to finance Fernando Gabrielesky's operations forging Argentinian currency. Gabrielesky was a veritable genius of the graphic arts who also subscribed to anarchistic views.[9]

[9] In *La Protesta* of January 11, 1929, Diego Abad de Santillán was to mince no words in the course of a virulent attack upon the anarchist expropriators. In an article entitled 'Deviations from Anarchism' and subtitled 'A propos of recent instances of common crime', he not merely mentioned the actions carried out by the anarcho-bandits but also gave the full names of the authors of those deeds—"For several years now there has been no sensational instance of vulgar criminality in this country which has not brought to light the names of veteran and new anarchists. For the boldest, hold-ups of bank tellers or, for others the forgery and passing of counterfeit money, these, plus a thousand other forms of life on the margins of labour have been the order of the day over these past years for a series of individuals disguised by the name of anarchism. We wish to appeal to the better judgement of anarchists in an effort to bring to an end, and to isolate this kernel of the perversion and distortion of our ideas and methods of struggle. Anarcho-banditry is, regrettably, a veritable plague: there are areas where all propaganda on behalf of, and all sympathy with anarchy has been killed off because of this criminality.

Already there are grounds for despair. Anarcho-banditry, which at other times has been an invention of the police, is today a sad reality. In Argentina, in France, in the United States, etc it is advocated and preached almost as a virtue by some newspapers which call themselves anarchist and which are read by anarchists with the passive mentality of newspaper readers. Very few of us have taken a stand against this dangerous anomaly.

In Santa Fe a number of individuals have been arrested as counterfeiters or passers of forged currency. The press has described one of them, a Siberiano Dominguez as, 'anarchist writer and orator': all of those arrested have been lumped together as, 'known anarchists'. The wider public is already full of such tales which are repeated with glibness; it knows about the Rawson and Messina hold-ups in Montevideo: it knows about the Morettis and Roscignas, etc, etc and it seeks diversion in avid reading of these items. As far as the wider public is concerned, all it knows is the following: for a number of years now, the most spectacular stories featured on the crime pages have had as their protagonists persons described as anarchists. And this is hardly calculated to arouse an interest in our ideas in upright, worthy people. The arrest of Siberiano Dominguez for the passage of counterfeit money provides us with the chance to lay stress upon the necessity of all who have some regard for our ideas reflecting and studying upon some way of creating more favourable conditions for our propaganda. Dominguez dropped out of our movement some 8 or is it 10, years ago. In the past he interested us but little and today not at all. But he is down in police files as an anarchist and his every act will be capitalised upon to the detriment of anarchism by our enemies. This we know in advance and when, in spite of this knowledge, such people persist acting in this twisted way it is because they do not care much for the credibility or prestige of our beliefs. We who do not think along those lines, and we who seek to spread the authentic meaning of anarchism, would be acting in a counterproductive way were we to applaud always everyone who proclaims himself an anarchist, even though we know that he depends exclusively upon the proceeds of robbery and hold-ups for his living.'

Di Giovanni was to smuggle some of the forged currency into Argentina and with it, he began to finance the purchase of material for the approaching campaign of agitation, demanding Radowitzky's release.

On November 14, the anarchist autonomous syndicates in Rosario called an indefinite strike which would last until such time as Radowitzky would be released. Their colleagues in Buenos Aires came out in sympathy for 24 hours. A huge rally was planned for 4pm on November 14 in the Plaza Congresso. But the climate had to be prepared in advance.

On the night of November 10 a curious suitcase had been left at the Cathedral by the door nearest to Reconquista Street. At a few minutes past lam the package drew the attention of two people who approached it, saw that it was a suitcase and tried to pick it up. They found that it was very heavy and was curiously warm to the touch. They then sought out policeman Francisco Castro who was at the junction of the Diagonal Sur and Bolivar. He rushed to the spot, lifted the suitcase and carried it to a place where the light was better, at Diagonal Norte 501, where the cafe *El Alkazar* was situated. Unable to open the lock, he set off in search of tools to the dairy at 532 Rivadavia Street which was still open then. He returned to find that a young man had taken hold of the suitcase in order to get a closer look at it. As he spotted the approaching policeman, the young man smiled and waved to him, pointing at the suitcase and calling out, "Look what I have found here". At that instant the suitcase exploded.

The poor wretch was blown to pieces: by an exceptional stroke of luck, the policeman avoided the same fate, but was badly injured. The explosion had

---

This is followed up by an obvious reference to Di Giovanni when Santillán states, 'We cannot show indulgence towards those who capitalise upon the ideas of anarchism of which they proclaim themselves one day the partisans only to set up a school of banditry and corrupt a number of young people who might otherwise have been useful to the cause of progress.'

Further on still, in the section sub-headed, 'Let us isolate the seat of the corruption!', Santillán addresses to *La Antorcha* and Rodolfo Gonzalez Pacheco (without naming either) a suggestion concerning ways in which to combat this anarcho-banditry—"Can it be that comrades from other factions fail to appreciate the magnititude of the disaster for anarchism implied by the already extra-ordinary upsurge in the number of common criminals donning the mantle of his ideas? There have been those prompted by personal hatred who have, in the belief that they thus do us harm, attracted to their camp people with whom we have severed all connections, and by refusing compromise have broken with a complicity that is repugnant to the purity of our ideas. The time has now come to confess that fact, setting aside supposed appearances and any personal dislikes which may divide us'. He went on to propose that we—"eradicate the deadly cancer" of anarcho-banditry and that the Prisoners' Aid Committee should pay no heed to the anarcho-bandits, thereby isolating them and casting them into oblivion." But he went beyond even this although he spoke in vague terms, saying—'our approach, whereby we isolate and ignore those who live beyond the margins of work and all sense of responsibility seems to us the most logical course, but should another exist we should have no reason to raise objections to it. . . '

smashed all the windows in the city centre. Hours passed before the bomb's victim was identified as one Luis Rago, who had just finished his night shift at the Bank of Boston. Rago was 25 years old, had been married barely a year and had a young daughter only a few weeks old.

The bomb had been intended to destroy Buenos Aires Cathedral and only a freak of fortune, or "the hand of God" as the Sunday sermon was to have it, spared the building. The catholic church never forgave Severino Di Giovanni for his attempt on the Cathedral and as late as 1957 in an article carried by the catholic daily, *El Pueblo* he was described as "the most evil man ever to tread the earth of Argentina".

Naturally, the opposition press were to lay the blame squarely on the shoulders of Yrigoyen, alleging that he did not know how to govern. Yrigoyen left the police to get on with it and kept out of the controversy. Although the bombing of the Cathedral had provoked a considerable storm, excitement grew and further bombs followed four days later. One of them went off at the High Court in Rosario.

La Protesta[10] was to be forthright in its condemnation of the Cathedral bombing and was insistent that such actions had nothing in common with the anarchist ideal. Scarcely one month later the truth about the Cathedral bombing emerged, and represented a moral obligation to Di Giovanni which he was unwilling to shirk, and which was subsequently to lead to his downfall.

On December 12 1928 a police team forced their way into the house at 1184 Estomba Street and made a search of the attic where, as the dismayed homeowners looked on, seven bombs all but complete and some 147 forged ten pesos notes were discovered. Under questioning the residents disclosed that since August 16 the attic had been home to an eighteen year old student and that another man would come every four or five days to spend the night there. This second man was a taxi-driver and the only visitors the student received, apart from him, were two young 16 year old girls, one of whom was his sister.

The police laid in wait in the courtyard for the student to arrive. Two hours later he turned up: he was Alejandro Scarfó. Realising that he was surrounded, he picked up a chair with which to defend himself but was overcome. Then his room-mate arrived, one Jaime Gómez Oliver, a 30 year old Spaniard down on police files as an anarchist agitator.

A fine haul for the police; in addition to the bombs, they had discovered under a bed a trunk containing dynamite provided by the Simplicio brothers and Marino

[10] Concerning this bombing and the one being prepared against the visit of the US president elect, Herbert Hoover, *La Protesta* was to write—"they are beyond all logic and are quite possibly the products of a childish mentality which has more to do with subversive idiocy than with anarchist ideas'. (January 6, 1929).

de la Fuente (all of whom professed an idiosyncratic anarchism . . . they were poets and hobos) from a quarry their father owned in Córdoba. The trunk had been sent in the name of Pedro Mannina, an anarchist bricklayer who lived in Buenos Aires. A whole supply line. The plans of Caseros railway station were also found. A bomb was to be exploded there two days later when the Herbert Hoover president-elect of the United States would be passing through on a visit.

But the most conclusive evidence which pointed to Alexandro Scarfó's having been responsible for the Cathedral bombing was when a clipping from *La Prensa* was found in the attic. That clipping contained a report of the death of bank employee Luis Rago. In the margin Scarfó had written in ink, "it was not intentional". Such was the evidence which the courts would use to pass the sentence upon him months later; he was to join Radowitzky in Ushuaia serving a life sentence.

The young Scarfó instantly accepted full and sole res-ponsibility for possession of the explosives, alleging that Gomez Oliver was merely a friend, who had known nothing of their presence in their lodgings. But Gomez Oliver's known ideological convictions as well as those of Mannina and the "hobo-poets" were enough to ensure that they too ended up in jail. Thus the Scarfó family suffered a fresh blow . . . particularly América Josefina since her parents were now to have their eyes opened to the perilous game in which she was engaged.

Of course, the police and the press spoke as one in pointing to Di Giovanni as the true culprit. The police had been working quietly and were confident that he would not long elude capture. The trap had been carefully laid. Teresina had moved house yet again, this time to 2070 Curupayty Street, owned by Valentín Alsina. The place was home to several workers for whom Teresina did the laundry and mending. The police managed to induce one of them, a certain Kaisermann, to supply them with a daily report of goings-on in the house. Thus they discovered that a worker Rafael Antinori was the one entrusted with carrying food and a little money to Teresina. Every day, after work, Antinori used to drop a parcel or two into the home of Di Giovanni's wife. Kaisermann added that, on Sunday between noon and lpm Teresina had had a visitor, José Romano (Ramé) who had brought her money and foodstuffs and had later taken the two Di Giovanni children out for a walk to the anarchist picnic in the Tres Ombues estate in San Isidro where a photograph was taken that included Di Giovanni, side by side with his youngest, Ilvo. And then a detail upon which police seized; Kaiserman reported that his friend Ponce de León had told him that Di Giovanni would again attend a *La Antorcha* picnic due to be held on Sunday, December 2 in that same San Isidro neighbourhood.

Preparations were made for a great manhunt on that day. From early on the Buenos Aires police and the Buenos Aires provincial force kept a discreet watch on roads giving access to the Tres Ombues estate. Upwards of 5,000 people were

congregated there on that sunny Sunday. And among them were *antorchistas* who had chosen a site for themselves very close to the river. Tension was running high among the plainclothes detectives and the officers and men in civilian dress (all kitted out as Sunday strollers) because they were under orders not to let him escape. This was to be the big moment. He was easy to identify: they had seen his photograph in the paper a hundred times over and anyway, he was always dressed in black. Naturally, the crunch would come just when his children arrived. The hours passed . . . and no sign of the one they were waiting for. Had he suspected something? Had he smelled danger? Evening was falling and the antorchista group was wandering off in the direction of San Isidro station. There, at one metre intervals, plainclothes police were waiting, mixing in with weary picnickers. Thus as the first shadows began to fall and even lovers began to drift away, the riverbank returned to its dismal calm. Inspector Garibotto had been disappointed yet again.

For Di Giovanni, the capture of Alejandro Scarfó and his four comrades represented a blow which drove him to despair. Emotional as ever, he particularly regretted Alejandro's arrest for he was the younger of the two Scarfó brothers whom he had taken with him from their parental home.

At least now he would not have to go off looking for 'names' for his campaign of agitation. He had a symbol in Alejandro and determined to make an effort on his behalf. He was to spend a year and a half figuring out ways of securing Alejandro's release. When the time came he would make his move.

But there were other things happening that December of 1928. Di Giovanni took it upon himself to find a good defence counsel for the five prisoners and also hunted for some way of contacting Josefina. In addition there was another matter which filled him with doubt: how could the police so easily have discovered his comrade's hideout? The circle of his immediate comrades insinuated that, since the administrator of *Culmine* Giulio Montagna had got married he had undergone a complete change of manner.

Between anarchist factions the controversy raged on. *La Protesta* never let up in its criticisms of Di Giovanni and his men. In an article which appeared over the signature of Diego de Santillán on January 29 1929, and whose title was "On the subject of anarcho-banditry", Santillán wrote, " . . . were a common criminal, after having perpetrated his offence, to seek our aid in eluding persecution, then even though we would repudiate that offence we could not but render him the assistance he sought. It is a question of the instinctive solidarity with him against an enemy worse than the common criminal . . . we mean the State, capitalism's political agent. But our outlook and our feelings may not be the same when confronted by an anarcho-bandit; speaking as individuals, our attitude would not

be the same, for we should not have the slightest compunction in manifesting our absolute refusal of solidarity, nor would we award that solidarity as a group since our prisoners' aid committees refuse assistance to those who are not imprisoned for social struggles and, whereas common criminals who operate on their own accounts and at their own risk have no claim upon our sympathies, that criminality which cloaks itself in the mantle of ideas merely in order to bring discredit upon them, while exploiting those ideas to its own advantage deserves our complete repudiation."

Such was the hardening of attitudes among anarchists that *La Protesta* held a common criminal in higher regard than any anarcho-bandit or anarchist expropriator.[11]

---

[11] The following further extracts from the signed article by Diego Abad de Santillán will afford us a deeper insight into the savagery of the internal squabbles of the anarchists (which had assumed nationalistic overtones, with the Spaniards Lopez Arango and Abad de Santillán vociferating from the columns of *La Protesta* against the Italian anarchists)... "We are not talking about isolated events. Day in day out the crime pages are full of vulgar crimes vaguely linked in a deliberate way with anarchism. Over the past 5 years, the most spectacular crimes on police records—bank hold-ups, robberies against pay clerks, counterfeiting of currency, irresponsible bombings, etc,—have slung mountains of mud at the anarchist movement. Were these only a few, isolated circumstances without further implications, we should make our stand and proclaim that we are being slandered and that the police are inventing phoney connections. But the most patient man in the world eventually wearies of lying to himself: anyway no one would believe us if we were to issue systematic denials of any connections with these feats, and certain individuals who claim to be anarchists. In the end, we must candidly admit that it is true: in anarchism's name there exists a plague of swindlers who are deliberately confusing our revolutionary theses of social expropriation with a vulgar individual 'appropriation', with larceny or outright banditry according to their individual temperaments. Indeed we are living in a period of moral decline: the wider public is concerned only to read the crime and sports pages: they have only a slight interest in anything outside of these. On the crime scene, today's public is a veritable encyclopedia and any passerby in the street can repeat a thousand details about the Rawson robbery, the bombing of the Italian consulate or the counterfeiting of currency which has come to light of late and he will tell you also that this is what anarchist activity is all about.

In addition there is a whole wealth of literature in which our enemies might discover abundant ammunition for the denigration of anarchism; for instance take *L'Adunata dei Refrattari* of New York ...its last issue was given over to insulting us in every way because of our opposition to anarcho-banditry and because we said that the bombs at the Italian consulate were fascist bombs, police bombs or planted by some abnormal person who deserves to be in an asylum. In *L'Adunata dei Refrattari* the Italian comrades in the United States have an organ which has, especially of late, become an apologist for all of the degenerate forms of anarchism: there in its pages one may find all manner of apologies for anarcho-banditry even in its most repulsive forms. These people have accepted the bourgeois litarati's distortions of our movement as accurate and it appears that they have only one aim — to justify all of the fictions which the bourgeoisie has invented concerning anarchism. And, like *L'Adunata dei Refrattari*, there are a few other newspapers which, disguised as anarchist papers, rally to the defence of the most absurd and anti-anarchistic of actions.

To all of these we say that it is not possible to square an attitude of unmitigated hypocrisy with

Italian anarchists rose up in fury at *La Protesta*'s line and thus we find *L'Emancipazione* of San Francisco, California, proclaiming in a banner headline, "In Buenos Aires, in the course of the cyclopean campaign for the release of Radowitzky, two young comrades, Scarfó and Oliver have fallen into the hands of the enemy. That enemy, to avenge himself for the affronts he has suffered, is trying to envelope them in the shroud of inexplicable mystery. *La Protesta* has ignored them and is trying to cast them aside: we are mortified at this and protest at such conduct, raising our voices in a cry of alarm."

But, issue after issue, Lopez Arango and Diego Abad de Santillán continued to rage against Di Giovanni's methods; the columns of *La Protesta* were even given over to personal insult and abuse. Diego Abad de Santillán put his signature to an article in which he spoke thus of Severino Di Giovanni: "A propos of the acts of terrorism which have, in recent years, furnished so much of the copy for our crime pages, we have alluded to a certain scoundrel concerning whom we have offered the following hypotheses . . . that he is either a fascist agent, an instrument of the police or a poor lunatic. Referring to a scoundrel and drawing that person out of obscurity in order to disclose his name with a great show of exhibitionism, amount to the same thing. Some have said that we ought to have

---

one's conscience. We are fed up with laying the blame for everything at the door of the police and we are fed up with championing phoney innocences. We seek to make of our press a vehicle for our thoughts and feelings and not merely yet another means of deceiving the public and deceiving ourselves. If, in the name of some non-existent solidarity, some solidarity which cannot exist, we have to put up with and defend to the bitter end, common criminals who style themselves anarchists or who once were anarchists, and if we must proclaim the innocence of vulgar hold-up men and lie about the most self-evident facts, then how do we differ in any way from bourgeois journalism?"
He closes by declaring open season on the anarchist expropriators—"It is necessary to eradicate the cancer of banditry from the movement's ranks: to achieve it we need only one thing—we must refuse all financial solidarity to those who are captured as a result of such activities. When all is said and done money is collected for social reasons and it is truly immoral to capitalise upon the sentiment of solidarity with our prisoners, in order to rally to the defence of vulgar criminals, or rather not vulgar criminals, but those who do anarchism greater harm than they inflict upon the bourgeoisie. Comrades of every persuasion should recognize the need for this cleansing operation. Already, in the estimation of the broad masses, anarchism is greatly disgraced: unless we throw up a rampart against those who live through hold-ups and robberies and the like, no one shall ever be able to persuade the general public that anarchism is anything other than a gang of *desperado* without conscience who will not shrink from murder and bold robberies.'
And, in a clear reference to Di Giovanni, he says, 'Although we repudiate equally every manifestation of anarcho-banditry, we draw a distinction between the instigators and the victims thereof; there are some young men given over to a life which will, sooner or later lead them into prison. They are warped by bad teachers and, were they to be snatched out of the underworld in which they live they might well become excellent militants. Many young people find themselves in such circumstances. Comrades of every persuasion should make every effort to save them, though the task be a painful one.'

kept the controversy against anarcho-banditry on the level of theory. There is something to be said for that, but it does not say all that needs to be said. No, it is not always possible to keep personalities out in such cases. Or perhaps there are those who would wish to see us yield to the line that all that proceeds from anarchists or alleged anarchists is healthy and good? We believe that it will not come to that."

Di Giovanni was never to forgive the suggestions that he was a "fascist agent" or "an instrument of the police". He approached the leading moral authorities of anarchism to urge them to demand a retraction by *La Protesta* and, Aldo Aguzzi[12] (with whom he had by then been reconciled) was approached and urged to demand of Lopez Arango and Abad de Santillán that they cease their campaign against him and retract the offending words. Both refused to do so and persisted with their attacks upon the expropriators.

Meanwhile, inspector Garibotto was following the controversy closely for he knew that it could only end in tragedy.

On February 5 1929, six unknown persons robbed the paymasters of the Kloeckner company in Empedrado Street in Buenos Aires. The pay clerks had come from the city centre, from the Bank of Boston, in two cars. The robbers had lain in wait in a large convertible just a few metres from the gates of the company premises. They went into action with awesome speed, snatching a briefcase containing some 19,000 pesos. As they prepared to escape the Kloeckner employees traveling in the second vehicle opened fire on them. A ferocious exchange of gunfire ensued followed by a spectacular chase as the robbers were pursued as far as Gaona Street, but to no avail. Then they managed to disappear. One of them was Severino Di Giovanni.

After this robbery something strange happened—it was not attributed to Di Giovanni. By contrast he had been credited with responsibility for many others with which he had had nothing to do. The only thing which police were able to establish concerning the Kloeckner wages snatch was that, judging by the accents, the robbers had included some foreigners. They arrested a Spanish anarchist, Dositeo Ferijo Carballedo, a driver. Years before, he had been accused

[12] This reconciliation was effected through the good offices of Nicolas Recchi, a sort of anarchist 'good angel' who always gave shelter to those in need of it. Recchi had come to Argentina from the United States where he had been a member of the same group as Sacco and Vanzetti. He lost a hand in a bomb blast, but despite this he supported his family in Argentina by working as a bricklayer. In 1931, he was imprisoned for having harboured Silvio Astolfi, there he was barbarously tortured and finally deported under the provisions of the *Ley de Residencia*.
The meeting at which Di Giovanni and Aguzzi were successfully reconciled was also attended by their fellow Italians Vecchietti and Tognetti.

of having been the driver for the German anarchist, Kurt Wilckens on the day when Wilckens assassinated Lieutenant Colonel Varela. Police tried to implicate him as one of the wages snatch gang, but to no avail.

I personally have no doubt that the Kloeckner wages snatch was the work of the Di Giovanni group. On February 3 1929 —or two days before the snatch—Di Giovanni wrote to Fina from his hideout in the Delta, "Tomorrow I am going to Buenos Aires. Unfortunately I shall not be able to see you. But how can we meet? It is a real problem, my beloved friend." And on February 8 1929 (three days after the robbery) he wrote again from the Delta area, "I visited the city of our magical dreams on the day I mentioned to you. More than once I passed within a few blocks of your home. I wanted to call upon you. Just to give you a single kiss: although I should have been happy even just to look upon you, to drink in your appearance with my eyes and to carry you so far, far away to my lonely nest where the neck of my lovely swan brings no joy to the vast greenery. Instead, I did not see you. I strolled along Gaona Street at l0am (the robbery took place at noon) but the market was not set up between Esperanza and San Nicolas. Have they moved it? I was trying to see your mother, so I risked sending my 'driver' to call. But not being able to spot the 'old lady', I gave up. Maybe a happy encounter would have left me content and, once beside you, your poor blond rascal might not have been able to resist carrying you off, far, far away . . . But I must confess that I had another duty to perform that day. A life and death duty which I had to perform with all of the energy I could muster and which I brought to a happy conclusion with the help of some valiant friends. It was a lightning swoop by society's bandits . . . men put outside the law who had to smash with all their strength the steely ring of domination . . . We won! And the victory which we won has all the ramifications of difficult things. By some miracle, I saved my accursed carcass. Today we are the new men sprung from resurrected life. Tempered like powerful steel we shall stride forward towards fresh victories in affirmation of our right to life, our life of freedom. And so complete the cycle of new resurrections, until such time as life is not stifled and we may finish the affair."

The nature of this man was remarkable. Obviously he was under the influence of an emotion somewhere between the heroic and the romantic, his selflessness overflowing from the limits of the ordinary, the commonplace, the legal and the constituted order. He would never have been able to accept taxes, fines, regulations, ordinances, patents, laws or PROPERTY. So it is natural that society, founded upon these principles, should defend itself tooth and nail against this dangerous individual who believed in free will.

VII. The struggle is always a bitter one

> . . . but we shall hold fast, and hold steady the tiller of our Argus vessel and turn our sails intrepid and eager towards the Golden Fleece of our dreams with all of the ardour and daring of our youth . . .
>
> S. Di Giovanni, January 29 1929

On April 23, without warning, the police fired their way into the home of David Cortucci at 4156 San Juan Street. Just a few minutes earlier Severino Di Giovanni had been there; a miraculous escape. Obviously, someone had betrayed him.

That very night Giulio Montagna—a 23 year old Italian, recently married—moved hastily along with his wife to a new address at 1199 Monte Dinero Street. He was accompanied by José Romano (Ramé) who, having no place of his own, had been living with the couple for some days.

At 5.30am on April 25, Montagna stepped out of his apartment into the courtyard to wash in the sink there. It was a cold and misty morning. The sky was overcast. It was still almost pitch darkness. At 5.40am there came a vigorous knock at the front door. There was only one witness to what ensued, the concierge.

She says that she came out of her apartment to answer the door and just then caught sight of Montagna who was washing at the sink in the yard. She opened the door to a pale young man who looked to be about 27 years old; he was wearing a black hat and had on a black neckerchief. He asked for Montagna and she waved him towards the sink. They exchanged greetings in Italian and she watched as the stranger strode towards him. Then, she says, she saw nothing more for she returned to her apartment. Instantly four shots rang out, the outside door to the street slammed shut and an engine started up outside.

The police report was to record that Montagna was shot four times and collapsed, seriously wounded . . . while en route to hospital, he managed to murmur to the policeman escorting him . . . "It was Eduardo Di Giovanni . . . " Then this was corrected and the dying man apparently stated . . . " It was Eduardo or Severino Di Giovanni."

This casts some doubt on the police report for, had he said anything, the wounded man must have said "It was Severino Di Giovanni" and not "Eduardo", who did not exist. Montagna's wife—Benedicta Settecase—stated that her husband had no enemies, had never been threatened and that, on the day of the attack, she was in bed and unable to see the face of the attacker.

The investigation could go no further. José Romano was arrested. It was all an impenetrable mystery. Had it indeed been Di Giovanni that fired the shots that morning? Why did he do it? Was Montagna really a police informer?

The newspapers showed no scruples in headlining the charge that the Montagna murder was down to Severino Di Giovanni. *La Protesta* seized the opportunity to indulge in a little irony. "Yet again the crime page has been filled in most curious fashion. The facts with which it is crammed are the following, which we quote from the bourgeois press, adding nothing and subtracting nothing. In Monte Dinero Street lived an Italian couple, Giulio Montagna and his wife. We are told that Montagna was the administrator of an Italian periodical by the name of *Culmine*; that co-incidence has prompted us to read the crime pages. According to them, on Thursday morning a stranger sought to speak to Montagna and then, suddenly, upon sighting him he let off four pistol shots. The victim collapsed, mortally wounded, but when the police arrived, still managed to speak one name—Severino Di Giovanni. He said nothing more and the police are indulging in all manner of conjectures about the involvement of a woman, about the circulation of counterfeit money, etc, etc. Be that as it may, the news is worth the trouble of recording in these columns . . . "

The police did not make many further inquiries. The affair was placed in the hands of a magistrate who issued a warrant for the arrest of Di Giovanni. For his part, the alleged culprit never issued a denial of the implications of the newspapers. He said not a word on the subject. Almost exactly one and a half years later, in the fortnightly paper *Anarchia*, in an article on the methods employed by police to destroy anarchism, Di Giovanni wrote of their use of informers; he mentioned Montagna in that context and described him as a Judas Iscariot.

May 1929 was a hard month for Di Giovanni. He had few safe houses left by then and was running short of finance. The money netted in the Kloeckner raid was almost gone. At a secret meeting, the Buenos Aires bakery workers had decided to launch a collection for the fugitive anarchist. The bakers and some autonomous unions from Avellaneda and Berisso continued to look upon Di Giovanni sympathetically, unlike the FORA which, in this respect, took the *La Protesta* line on him.

In the months of January, February and March the police were hot on Di Giovanni's heels and he was finally obliged to take refuge in the Delta Area. There he was to find work, harvesting peaches. On February 3 1929 he was to write to Josefina, " . . . out here the air is pure and the greenery vast and limitless; the water is yellowish but it is fresh and very good for repeated bathing. And the freedom! Indescribable. I want to send a crate of peaches to your brother, José, how should I go about it? I could send it directly to his house some evening when

he is at home, through a comrade. How would that be? Then you too would be able to try the fruit gathered by your blond rascal."

Some days later he added, "I sent comrade Gonzalez on two occasions to Ilvo's mother's home (he is referring to his wife, Teresina) with 50 pesos, a basket of peaches and thirty kilos of pure honey. That way my children, Ilvo, Aurora and Laura—and Erinna, too—may eat their fill. Should you visit their house have them give you a pot of Asuncion yerba tea full of honey; then you can taste for yourself, through me, all of the profound sweetness of the pure nectar of our fruitful bees (. . .). This time I cannot send money to Elena (Alejandro Scarfó's fiancee) because we are down to our last . . . and, long live poverty, long live life and all its delights! If we manage to surmount this crisis we shall be rich in joy and bursting with satisfaction."

In April[13], Di Giovanni—who henceforth used the alias Mario Vando—was to receive some morale boosters; the father figure of Luigi Fabbri wrote to him criticising the terms used by Abad de Santillán. Also, from a prison-cell in Comstock, New York, he received a letter from Vincenzo Capuana, who was, in the eyes of Italian anarchists, the most brilliant representative of heroic anarchism.

But despite this, Emilio López Arango, as director of *La Protesta* refused to retract. Aldo Aguzzi had approached him several times to let him know that Di Giovanni was ready to take steps to vindicate his honour unless the description of him as a "fascist agent or instrument of the police" was withdrawn. The bit about him being "a poor lunatic" and "a scoundrel" did not concern Di Giovanni at all. The rest made his blood boil, though.

López Arango dismissed Di Giovanni's threat and told Aguzzi that, that very day, he had received word from various sections among the bakery workers to the effect that they were going to kill him for having dared to criticise their practice of throwing bombs indiscriminately at bakery vans and bakeries. And he assured Aguzzi that the threats did not cost him a thought.

Things went so far that the head of the Political Bureau, Inspector Garibotto, no less, met with Diego Abad de Santillán and announced that he had learned of Di Giovanni's intention of killing him. He offered Santillán protection and a permit to carry weapons. He hinted that he should change his address and vary his routes. But Abad de Santillán rejected all of Garibotto's suggestions and continued as before. A short time afterwards, in the pages of *La Protesta*, a poll was launched; answers were invited from anarchists of every school. To them were put six weighty questions, all of them directed against Di Giovanni:

[13] After Montagna's death, Di Giovanni was to go into hiding in the hinterland of Buenos Aires province.

1. Can anonymous terrorism striking at random be regarded as a weapon of the anarchist movement?
2. Do hold ups, bank robberies, wages snatches and the rest bring any benefit to our ideas or to the anarchist movement, or are they counter-productive?
3. What is your attitude with regard to the special case of the bombing of the Italian Consulate in Buenos Aires?
4. Assistance to those imprisoned for social reasons. Should that assistance be made available to all prisoners, generally or not?
5. Heartfelt and complete solidarity with prisoners . . . is this not conditioned by the nature of the cause which has them behind bars? Can we feel equally involved in the fate of one who has done something we repudiate? Does the imprisoned because of his ideas find himself in the same situation as one taken as a result of murder or vulgar theft?
6. Can the deeds of a Radowitzky or a Wilckens be compared with the terrorism lately practised in Buenoes Aires?"

On October 25 1929 someone hammered with open hands upon the door of the house where *La Protesta*'s director, Emilio López Arango lived. It was getting dark, being around 7pm López Arango was in the kitchen with his elder son and a friend. He had not reported for work that day, for his wife was ill—she had only recently been discharged from hospital following an operation—and someone had to look after their three children.

Things were quiet in San Martin Street between Pastor Ferreyra and Ramón Franco Streets in the Remedios de Esculada Oeste quarter. It was a balmy evening in spring. López Arango heard the noise at the door and went out to see who it was. What happened after that will never be known for sure. We can only guess. Three gunshots startled the whole neighbourhood. López Arango was found sprawled beside the barred door, in the pathway lined by the flowerbeds. He had taken all three shots full in the chest. Asked whether he had recognized his assailant, he nodded agreement. Nothing more. He died shortly afterwards without having spoken a word.

There were no eyewitnesses. Somebody was to say that they heard a car engine start up after the shots. A couple who ran a nearby bakery and a woman customer stated that, shortly before the murder, they had seen three men standing alongside an old-fashioned taxi. The one at the wheel was smallish, the other two fair-haired and tall. One of the latter had been wearing a black hat and dark clothing.

At first the *La Protesta* people were totally at a loss. What clues they had did not lead them to Di Giovanni. At first, they thought that the assassin or assassins must have been some of the bakery workers who had several times made threats against López Arango's life. Some of them had cherished a deep hatred of the dead man;

they called him a bombero (fireman) because he poured water on their union's violent schemes. Some *La Protesta* people resolved to avenge López Arango's death and managed to capture several bakery workers whom they considered likely suspects. But then leaders of the bakers' autonomous unions turned up spontaneously to assure the *La Protesta* people that they had had nothing to do with the murder of López Arango. They gave their word of honour as anarchists on that. Only then did suspicion fall upon Di Giovanni. They set off in search of him, intending to kill him. To gun him down on the spot.

But they failed to find him. They were unable to trace his whereabouts. "His friends stuck by him to the death, none of them said a word", we were told by a leading *protestista* figure from the period.

No one was ever able to prove a thing. Even today, some anarchists cling staunchly to the belief that only Di Giovanni could have murdered López Arango. They base that belief on the tale (unconfirmed by the police or by the courts) that, before he breathed his last, López Arango managed to scribble something which could be deciphered as Di Giovanni's name. Others, though, mostly of the *antorchista* school, are not so sure. They point out that Di Giovanni was forever being credited with responsibility for every hold-up, bombing and all manner of crimes.

For our part, after careful and scrupulous research, we incline to the belief that it was indeed Severino Di Giovanni who killed López Arango. We infer as much from the private correspondence sent by the Italian theoretician Hugo Treni to Di Giovanni, in which Treni, aghast, is highly critical of the deed. We also base our belief upon conversations we have had with surviving members of Di Giovanni's intimate circle. Thus, although persuaded that it was he who committed the murder, we are uncertain as to how it happened. We do know that his comrades tried to talk him out of it but Di Giovanni's sense of injury and his anger were such that he was beyond argument and reason. It is possible that he went alone to López Arango's home, as some have maintained—went there on foot and fired his shots after a brief exchange with López Arango at his doorstep, (an exchange which drew only a sarcastic retort in Spanish) before fleeing on foot. But it is most likely that he traveled to the house in the taxi of a Spaniard by the name of Tomé[14] (the unquestioning 'driver' of the Di Giovanni group) who was of small stature (which tallies with the statements of the eye-witnesses in that bakery) and would have been the same person who drove him to Monte Dinero Street and that fatal meeting with Giulio Montagna. Another story has it that Tomé was unable to pick him up after the murder of López Arango because he spotted some

[14] Years on Tomé was to fight in the Spanish Civil War, where he lost a leg.

suspicious looking characters approaching, so Di Giovanni had been obliged to make his getaway on foot along de Remedios Street and de Escalada Street.

If the witnesses in the bakery were correct in their assertions that the anarchists who went to kill López Arango numbered three and not merely two, then the third (apart from Di Giovanni and Tomé) may have been Silvio Astolfi who was, like Di Giovanni, a blond.

Be that as it may, Severino Di Giovanni never denied the accusation that he had been the one who killed López Arango and whilst the commercial press used to describe Di Giovanni as "the man dressed in black", *La Protesta* thenceforth referred to him sarcastically as . . . "the man dressed in mourning."

Three days prior to the murder of López Arango there had been an anarchist attempt on the life of the head of the Political Bureau in Rosario, sub-inspector Juan Velar, better known as 'the Basque'. Velar was the policeman most hated by all of the anarchists in the city. He was not one to mince his words and used to boast . . . "any anarchist who falls into my hands needs to have scant regard for his life if he remains an anarchist . . . " His methods were direct and individual, involving no other officers or policemen. Not for him the refined methods of a later age, like the electric prod or the classic use of splinters forced beneath the fingernails. 'The Basque' would have anarchists brought to him one at a time, have their hands chained behind their backs and turned to face him. To begin with, he would tell the prisoner in a soothing voice, "you know, I love playing football", then suddenly he would lash out with a boot at the testicles of the poor wretch who would double up in pain. Whereupon Velar would set about kicking and punching him in a frenzy, ending only when his prisoner had been reduced to a bloodied heap.

Such were his infallible methods. If by chance he was accused of mistreating prisoners he came up with the classical explanation, "slipped and fell down the stairs", or, "tried to commit suicide by striking his head against the wall", or, "had himself beaten up by another prisoner so that he could bring charges of illegal treatment". He always had some petty thief or some policeman to testify on his behalf and invariably beat the charges. It was perhaps due to Velar's heavy-handed approach that strikes which hit Rosario about this time were to come to nothing despite the power of labour in the city. Repression cost the lives of many workers.

Velar applied his methods against workingmen and the leaders of a passive anarchism and against anarcho-syndicalists and nothing came of it, excepting the usual criticisms in papers and communiques, and they only drew a complacent smile from Velar. But whenever he toyed with a man belonging to Di Giovanni's

group, he signed his death warrant. . . in fact not a warrant for death but for something perhaps worse, more ignominious and more painful.

Roberto Lozada, the Spanish anarchist member of the expropriators' group, was captured in Rosario and sampled Velar's methods at first hand. . . perhaps even as no one else before him had done; for when he was released he was little more than pulp, an unrecognizable puree of humanity. He was broken, crushed, kicked to pieces.

Paulino Scarfó and Antonio Marquez undertook to take care of him. Exactly at noon on October 22 1929, sub-inspector Velar left his office to take his lunch at home—which lay scarcely 100 metres from police headquarters. He stepped into the street and set off briskly for the corner. There were two cars parked there, which struck him as somewhat unusual. But Velar was no coward and he continued on his way, not taking his eyes off the faces of the men as they walked towards him. They drew level with him and only then did Velar sense that all was lost with him. He had no time to react. Indeed when he heard a voice behind him say, "Inspector Velar?" he turned around, just as the explosion happened. He felt as if an almighty kick had crushed his face. Like a fire snaking into his eyes, up his nose, into his mouth, through every orifice. He collapsed in a dead faint.

The operation required of the surgeons the skills of a watchmaker. They had let him have it from the barrel of a modern shotgun. He had been shot in the face, evidently because his assailants had not wanted him dead but disfigured for life. And they certainly succeeded. The medical report was to note that inspector Velar had lost his right eye, his upper jaw had been smashed and almost all his teeth lost (the reporter for *La Prensa* was to write in pained tones that, ". . . several teeth were picked up by the soles of police boots') and most of his nose had been blown off. The following day, a medical bulletin recorded that doctors had had to intervene to save Velar's left eye. For the rest of his days Velar had been left with barely half a face.

Who did it? Even though his mouth had all but disappeared Velar managed to mumble to the chief of detectives, Felix de la Fuente, two names—the names of the two men who had climbed from that car and walked right up to him; he spoke of them clearly without faltering and when it came to the skills of identification—*manyamiento* in police jargon—Velar was not a man to make mistakes. The names were those of Severino Di Giovanni and Paulino Scarfó.

Crítica wasted no time in publishing a portrait of Severino Di Giovanni (its usual response to any crime of which it was notified) as the alleged culprit. The Rosario police went into action. All available men were put on to the streets and alleys in and around Rosario. Rosario's chief of police promptly telegraphed the chief of detectives in Buenos Aires. . . "Request you arrest Scarfó, Di Giovanni

and one other, traveling in a dark blue car, accused of seriously wounding sub-inspector Juan Velar . . . "

But, for all the deployment of resources, the detectives made no progress in their inquiries. Details of the offence were added to the growing file on Di Giovanni.

Although Velar insisted to the end of his days that his assailant had been Di Giovanni, we are firmly persuaded that Di Giovanni, whilst he may have known what was planned and whilst he may have endorsed the attack was not, himself, present in Rosario at the time. What information we possess indicates that Paulino Scarfó, Miguel Arcángel Roscigna, Umberto Lanciotti and Antonio Márquez were active in Rosario and that Roscigna had wielded the shotgun against Velar.

The weapon concerned was later discovered in an apartment rented by Di Giovanni in Burzaco; it was a modern Belgian weapon of great power. Emilio Uriondo had purchased it from the Rasetti company, but it is very possible that the weapon had been taken by Paulino Scarfó who, at a later date (towards the end of 1930) lived in the same apartment as Severino.

In any event, the attack on Velar boosted the morale of the 'expropriators' and encouraged them to pursue their struggle.

The revenge on Velar took place with the campaign for Radowitzky's release at its height. Even before then, Di Giovanni had realized that he would be increasingly on his own in implementing his plans. In a letter to Josefina Scarfó, he wrote of his weariness:

". . . What happened with that last strike was another sad spectacle. Although this time the sadness has been supplied by our so-called, self-styled comrades from the syndicalist sector. They expect to obtain clemency for our Simon (Radowitzky) from no less a personage than the chief assassin (Hipólito Yrigoyen) of Santa Cruz and of that January week of blood. (The Tragic Week of 1919). Where has it fled, and where does it hide the valour, steadfastness, extremism, revolutionary spirit and battling mentality which was once the gleaming virtue of this shadow of its former self? Is this the FORA? Can this be anarchism? Is this the heroism of Rosario? Are these the spiritual brothers of Luisa Lallana?[15] What a dismal, dismal spectacle! Oh, yes my dearly beloved friend, May 25 will come, the commemoration of that other revolution which was able to invest with a semblance of nationhood this far extremity of the Americas, but there will be no pardon from the butcher Yrigoyen! Of that you may be sure. Other methods, other battles are what we need if we are to impose our wishes upon those who rule. We must ask in a manly and proud posture and not beg on our knees."

[15] A working woman of Rosario, killed by police during a demonstration.

Months before that, he had been harsh in his criticisms of the *La Antorcha* people who, deep down, sympathised with him on account of his campaign against *La Protesta*, and who admired him although not agreeing with his methods. So he wrote to Fina, "I enclose a clipping from *La Protesta* (please let me have it back as soon as you have read it) so that you may get a glimpse of the new, tacit alliance between the occupants of the two 'trenches' that are fighting for the direction of this poor creole anarchism. D.A. de Santillán has made an appeal to the anarchists of Venezuela Street[16] and his indefatigable, persistent labours, it seems almost certain, have found their echo. Have you read no. 284 of *La Antorcha* (12 January)? Well, read over carefully the article by Horacio Badaracco entitled *Moral Leadership* and the other one, *Our Weapons* by C.A.B. (Balbuena). These are two gems of jesuitical literature. These two comrades do somersaults and scheme and twist and turn, and judge and assert and prove and . . . then . . . then they make you listen to the Latin of their masses and the idiosyncrasies of their 'chapel'".

This reaction from Di Giovanni was because of the two named editors of *La Antorcha*, after signing paeans to figures like Ascaso and Durruti and calling Alejandro Scarfó and Oliver heroes, ventured to criticise expropriating anarchists.

Di Giovanni described Balbuena as ". . . a chicken thief and puppet terrorist", and said of them all broadly . . . "grumpy eunuchs, you are unable to distinguish good from evil and you think only of your bellies . . . "

As is obvious Di Giovanni acknowledged no middle ground. Who was not with him was an enemy. He was no leader with the gift for recruiting converts with smiles or demagogy. He wanted to instruct through personal example and thus refused to accept that anyone could fail to understand him. In the letter cited above he spells out his lonely, harsh way of thinking . . . "Despite everything, beloved companion, we shall hold fast and hold steady the tiller of our vessel, Argus, and turn our sails, intrepid and eager, towards the Golden Fleece of our dreams with all of the ardour and daring of our youth, paying no heed to the daily or weekly pranks of certain personages who seek to manipulate the authentic, ethical essence of anarchic rebellions according to the whims of a majority, mistrustful of any selfless rashness . . . "

[16] A reference to the *antorchistas*.

VIII. For absolute freedom with a Colt .45

. . . and exchange this plate of lentils for an incredible inheritance of unattainable heights . . .

S. Di Giovanni

Fragments from the *Kingdom of Psyche*

On the morning of 24 December 1929 Hipólito Yrigoyen was the target of an unexpected assassination attempt. The Argentinian president escaped unscathed, and his would-be assassin Gualteria Marinelli was beaten and then shot to death by the president's bodyguards. Generally, not much attention was paid to the affair and it was assumed that the whole thing had been a product of a poor unbalanced mind. Yrigoyen ordered that the burial costs of his would-be assassin should be paid out of the public exchequer and made provisions for Marinelli's widow to receive a monthly pension of 100 pesos from the proceeds of the National Lottery.

La Protesta disowned the assassination attempt, pointing out that Yrigoyen meant more to anarchists alive than dead (because while he lived his mistakes would continue, but, once dead, he would become a mythical figure). The only person who endorsed Marinelli's attitude was Di Giovanni, who did so in an article published in *L'Adunata dei Refrattari* of New York. Di Giovanni was to explain that Marinelli's attempt on Yrigoyen's life had been prepared down to the tiniest detail and that Marinelli had been a member of the *Nueva Era* anarchist group and had had earlier experience of 'avenging action' in an attack mounted against a hotel in Pocitos, Uruguay. Later, in an article about Hipólito Yrigoyen, Di Giovanni placed a curious construction upon the character of 'Peludo' as Yrigoyen was familiarly known. The item was entitled, "Yrigoyen, caudillo" and, among other things, it stated, ". . . if Argentina is the home of caudillism, then Hipólito Yrigoyen is the very prototype of, the caudillo . . . an unspeakable blend of Cammorista and mafioso characterised by the total absence of chivalrous courage which, in its sympathetic form, characterized that old lord of the Argentinian countryside, the *gaucho*. In 60 years of political life—60 years of dark manoeuvres disguised beneath the charlatanism of the demagogue—Yrigoyen has twice achieved election to the highest office of the Republic. The bloodiest and most ferocious of deeds were done during his first term as president . . . his tribute to his profound love as Father of the Nation and Father of the Poor, a title which disguises his true self, courtesy of the ignoble fawning of his speechwriters."

". . . And just as the wolf may lose his hair but not his guile", Di Giovanni went on, "so, once back in office, Yrigoyen set about tormenting the generous soil of these Americans with fresh massacres of the proletariat. In San Francisco and Córdoba strikers demanding more humane treatment were recently routed by blood and fire. And only two months ago, in the premeditated disaster of the Plaza Once, the protests of the opposition at the murder of Carlos Washington Lencinas, killed on the direct orders of the caudillo, were silenced in a welter of bloodletting."

But at the end of 1929 Di Giovanni's chief concern was that he had not been able to keep his promise to secure the freedom of Alejandro Scarfó. That, and the fact that he had not been able to offer Josefina a home to share with him.

He fell prey to depression and discouragement. On Christmas Eve he wrote to his beloved, "Christmas Night. The storm strives to drown our discontent with the clamour of its din the way the lives of two white butterflies are ended between the fingers of a wicked child.

"Everything has stopped on the verge where death rushes past, where my wing hurls nostalgia like a dart towards the migrating light.

"Today as my Christmas present (on a feast day which holds unforgettable memories of my childhood days) I should like to make you an offering of my every thought. This gift I place before your eyes."

Seven days later on New Year's Eve, Di Giovanni was writing to her, "The end of the old year. A year of wishes unfulfilled. A seesaw of joys and sadness. Bitter fruits sampled in token of infinite delights. Almost all in vain. A year of sleepless nights, and days spent dreaming with open eyes. A year passed building fantastic and impossible castles in the air. A year of melancholy, nostalgic songs.

The end of the old year; you have entered my heart like some icy, disembodied hand; as an unmistakable token of the life that is past . . . Sirius points the way with a smile, and I haste anxiously towards my fate, with his kiss upon my forehead."

On January 20 1930, Agostino Cremonessi was murdered in the Parque de Independencia in Rosario. Another crime that was to go unpunished. The police hastened to accuse Di Giovanni of responsibility. For his part, Di Giovanni at first suspected Cremonesi's death of being retaliation by the protestistas for the killing of López Arango. Later, however, Di Giovanni was to express his firm belief that his friend Cremonessi had been murdered by the police.

In the story of Agostino Cremonessi we find another of the personal tragedies of anarchism. He was murdered at the age of 24. He had been born in northern Italy, in Pavia. He had been an anarchist since his teenage years and later spent some time in France, living alongside other Italian exiles before he came to Argentina.

His parents, Fortunato and Angela Colombo and his brother and sister, Emilio and Adele, settled in Rosario. Cremonessi himself stayed in Buenos Aires where he contacted Di Giovanni's *Culmine* group. Di Giovanni appointed him administrator of *Culmine* which, by mid-1928 was printing between 3000 and 4000 issues. The dollars sent by the Italian anarchists in the US to help Di Giovanni were made payable to the order of Cremonessi.

By day, Cremonessi worked as a waiter in the canteen of the Bank of France. He was an educated young man who had received two years of secondary schooling and who spoke French. He made anarchist propaganda among his workmates and in the Palace Hotel at 438 Victoria Street he boasted of being a skilled terrorist and would tell the story of the attack on the City Bank dwelling on the details, as if he had been in on it himself.

Apparently, he had known something of the preparations for the bombing of the Italian consulate, because consular employee Angelo Pizzocaro recognised him from photographs as one of the people who had been hanging around some days prior to the bombing. But Cremonessi had nothing to do with the actual bomb outrage. While he must have been in on the planning stages, what Di Giovanni had in mind seemed to him at the last minute to be too awful, or perhaps it was just that his mind was elsewhere . . . for Cremonessi had fallen in love with Maria Bossini, an Italian girl who lived in Rosario.

Here the man's tragedy begins. His girlfriend insisted on a quiet life; he would have to renounce his ideas. He began, indeed, to grow enamoured of the picture of tranquility and comfort associated with an ordinary, run of the mill household arrangement. But how could it be? It is hard to turn one's back on one's comrades right in the middle of their plans.

On what must have appeared to Di Gioyanni a likely enough pretext, Cremonessi left Buenos Aires on May 10 1928 (or 15 days before the bombing of the consulate) and made for Rosario. There he found work in his father's store at La Paz in Mitre Street but it seems obvious that he wanted to sever all connections with his political past and Rosario—where the anarchist movement was quite important—was hardly the place for that. So, on May 23 1926 Cremonessi journeyed to the Arias district in Córdoba where he found a job, working as a waiter under the alias, Bonifatti.

After the bombing of the consulate, Cremonessi's name and photograph were issued to all police posts throughout the country along with those of Severino Di Giovanni. Cremonessi learned from the press that he was being sought and gave himself up to the police. He stated that, yes, he had belonged to the *Culmine* group and had been the magazine's administrator for two months, before withdrawing from the group. He added that he dissociated himself from the consulate bombing and that . . . "my ideal today is to settle down with my girlfriend".

Cremonessi was held for six days, then released. During these six days something snapped in Cremonessi's mind. Apparently his release had been on special conditions. Doubtless, that he worked for police in two ways: by continuing to frequent anarchist meetings and inform the police of everything that took place. We have incontrovertible proof that Agostino Cremonessi was a police informer: a personal note from inspector De La Fuente, the chief of detectives in Rosario, sent to his counterpart in the Buenos Aires police. This note is dated January 21 1930 and reads as follows, "Tonight, at around 9.30pm, two persons unknown murdered Agostino Cremonessi, whom police here know first as a result of his activities in the anarchist camp and later through the friendly relations which he maintained with this force and this division. . . "

It is our belief that Di Giovanni never knew, or never wanted to know anything about Cremonessi's betrayal of him. But in the *Culmine* group were people who did know something, because on July 10 1928—a month and a half after the bombing of the Italian consulate—a detective reported to the Political Bureau of the Buenos Aires city police, "it is known that Agustin Cremonessi was at 250 Homero Street (Di Giovanni's house) visiting Di Giovanni's wife. Later two persons went in, one of them tall and dressed in black and the other smaller. They told the wife that Cremonessi was not to be admitted as they knew him for a traitor and police informer and were going to blow his head off."

Cremonessi was working for the police. This is evident from the fact that letters sent to him by Di Giovanni fell into the hands of the Rosario police. By a tragic irony, Di Giovanni writes to Cremonessi in one of them, "I recommend you not to write letters to anyone at this end because the police have us all under strict, unceasing watch: no need to provide them with the weapons they need to finish us. It seems to me that mistrust is one of man's chief gifts. And he should never flinch from relying upon it. As you see, I am happy as ever, in spite of God and his friends." And he signs off, "give my regards to Ramé and tell him that I won't be satisfied until I have him by the ears."

Ramé was to be arrested in Rosario in August 1929, charged with an attack on an electric tramway. Naturally, Cremonessi was arrested with him but was soon released. The same thing happened in November 1928 when two bombs exploded in Rosario. Some thirteen anarchists were rounded up; Cremonessi was one of them, and again he was released within a few hours. Obviously he had been included among the arrests only in order to avert the suspicions of his colleagues.

But it appears that the police reward their informers badly. Let us examine Cremonessi's death. His body was found in the Parque de Independencia; the police issued a statement which was taken up by the larger newspapers. Take *La Prensa* for example: "The person murdered last night turned out to be a dangerous anarchist. It is assumed that the killers are people of the same outlook as their

victim. This morning, police identified from, fingerprints, the person murdered last night in a remote and lonely area of the Parque de Independencia. He is a known anarchist of considerable influence among those professing extremist ideas, long active in the Federal Capital. Cremonessi was arrested for questioning in connection with the outrage against the head of the Political Bureau in Rosario, Juan Velar[17]. He was regarded as a go-between and actively sought. Then, one day, Cremonessi went of his own volition to the police authorities at Marcos Juarez where he stated that he wished to make a statement defending his innocence. Nonetheless, the police authorities were not satisfied. Thereafter he disappeared from Rosario until he returned to work as a porter in his father's store at Moreno in General López Street. Last night a constable, acting on information from a young person, uncovered a corpse at the top end of the Avenida de las Magnolias, at Cochabamba near the grandstand of Newells Old Boys. A neighbour stated that she had seen three people go by and that then one of them had cried out: "Don't kill me!" Two revolver shots were heard. She saw three people struggling on the ground before two of them stood up and ran away from the scene. Cremonessi had a stab wound in the left breast, a deep knife slash in the back, a bullet buried in his left cheek and a second bullet in the chest at heart level. Both shots had been fired from point-blank range. Apparently a mafia-style killing. Chief of detectives De La Fuente spoke over the telephone with Señor Santiago the chief of detectives with police in the Federal Capital."

The next day (24 January 1930) *La Prensa* reported the second version put out by police, "Police officers are convinced that the murderers were individuals of extremist outlook wreaking revenge for the information supplied to police by Cremonessi regarding certain anarchist activities. It is known that an undercover agent had several conversations with Cremonessi who reported to him on the activities of extremists, managing to bring to an end the frequent terrorist attacks being mounted against trams in this city. Some weeks ago, Cremonessi expressed to police fears that he would be murdered by Severino Di Giovanni because he was convinced that Di Giovanni had discovered his connections with the authorities. Days before he died, Cremonessi begged the officer with whom he was meeting to put him in touch with the acting chief of the Political Bureau, Marcelino Calambe, and an appointment was arranged. Calambe turned up as agreed. Not Cremonessi who was not seen again until he was found dead. Perhaps Cremonessi wanted to see Calambe in order to deliver Di Giovanni and his comrades to him, but later

[17] For many years, the Rosario police argued that Velar had believed it was Cremonessi who had furnished the information so that the shotgun attack on him would not fail. This means that Velar had also come to believe that Cremonessi was a 'double agent'. And revenged himself by sending him to his death. It is a thought-provoking detail to note that Cremonessi was shot in the left side of the face, the side in which Velar had been shot.

backed down out of fear or because he had fallen into their hands. After a search of Cremonessi's home, police seized forty-one anarchist books, a pawn ticket for a pistol and some other trifling objects. No letters or papers were recovered. Señor Santiago, chief of detectives in the Federal Capital has intimated that Severino Di Giovanni, Paulino Scarfó and Emilio Uriondo had journeyed armed to Rosario. The surveillance on roads, means of transport and banks has been redoubled."

After that . . . nothing. The papers ceased to concern themselves with Cremonessi's death and the police investigation stopped there. Nor did the judge concerned bother himself overmuch. The Cremonessi murder joined the list of unsolved cases. Public opinion recorded it as yet another of Di Giovanni's crimes. Even after his death Di Giovanni would still be credited with the death of Cremonessi.

We are thoroughly certain that Di Giovanni had absolutely nothing to do with it, though. First, because in the two other cases (López Arango and Montagna) he never made any denial of the charges levelled against him, instead, in his letters and writings he continued to attack them both, not worried that by doing so he was giving credibility to the suspicions of the police. By contrast, he never wrote a word against Cremonessi. Indeed, in a letter to Fina on February 13 1930, he wrote . . . "My dearest companion, amid the almost uninterrupted grief which assails us, a ray of delight has illuminated our path. Ramé is free! How much has changed! Around 20 days ago news from the same city brought us the mournful tidings of the death of Agostino Cremonessi, and now comes news of the release of this good fellow who—leaving no trail behind—has been snatched from under the very noses of the authorities. Who is to blame? The usual people. Really, the ingenuity of the police displays no originality, but what can we do about it? They are like those slow obstinate children who, faced with difficulties, can only stamp their feet on the ground, and always on the same spot."

In his closing remarks, Di Giovanni was making an ironic reference to the charge in the newspapers to the effect that he had been behind Cremonessi's killing and Ramé's escape. In another paragraph further on he added, "If you see Enea (Paulino Scarfó) tell him I have sent the letter to North America via the magazine *Reflejos* of Rosario, and ask him also to provide me with some information concerning the case, because, otherwise, his list of exploits will be too long to take in. You have seen how the freeing of Ramé was another of our exploits. You will see how it continues . . . ! No matter that our illustrious persons may be far, far away in Japan . . . that shall not stop us from having constant recourse to the powers of omnipresence made famous by the saint of Padua in Italy and Portugal."

The other allusion which Di Giovanni was to make to Cremonessi's death came in a letter which he wrote to his anarchist comrade, Errico, in Lyons, France. (He

wrote to him on February 6 and 12.)We can say that because in a reply to Di Giovanni's letter dated March 10 1930 Errico wrote the following, "It was with a great sense of indignation that I learned through your letter that our comrade Cremonessi has been done to death by the scum who huddle around that jesuitical paper *La Protesta*. Is it possible that these people have gone so far in anarchy's name? But in truth, it is the name of the most vile inquisition that they are acting. Comrade Cremonessi, from what little I knew of him, struck me as being a steadfast man, and had a lively appreciation of the ideas we hold so dear. Thus I am grieved by his untimely end, while my spirit wells up with a lust for vengeance against these wretched jesuits who hide behind our ideal."

With Di Giovanni and Paulino Scarfó eliminated as suspects (they were in Buenoes Aires at the time) and, having eliminated Ramé too (he was in jail) suspicion has to fall upon the anarchists of Rosario . . . possibly taking their revenge for Cremonessi's betrayals. But, surprisingly, the Rosario police did not make any arrests, nor did they pursue their inquiries into the murder. They contented themselves with a publication of a poster bearing Severino Di Giovanni's photograph and calling for the arrest of, "Severino Di Giovanni, alias Pascual Di Giorgio, alias Nivangio Donisvere"—on account of his having—"conspired as one of the perpetrators of the assault and wounding of detective sub-inspector Juan Velar, in the homicide of Augustin Cremonessi alias Bonifatti and for suspected involvement in the terrorist outrages in the Federal Capital in May 1928."

Thereafter—as usual—came silence.

In the report which inspector Garibotto was to submit to police headquarters regarding his final interview with Di Giovanni, prior to his execution, he notes that, "with regard to the death of Cremonessi, Di Giovanni expressed the firm conviction that it was the work of the Rosario police . . ."

But when all is said and done, all of this is mere speculation. Since the courts never bothered to clear up the incident (and that in itself is quite telling) a veil of suspicion and doubt has been drawn over the whole affair.

Early 1930. By January, Di Giovanni had planned his whole year's calender of theoretical activity. He was ready to publish an anarchist fortnightly magazine in Italian to serve as the mouthpiece of antifascists throughout Latin America. He wanted it to be a serious undertaking, well printed, that would provide a platform for the best thinkers of Italian anarchism. The graphic arts were his great passion and he concerned himself, not just with the contents of his publications but also with their presentation. His dream was to set up a printshop of his own where he would be able to publish books and pamphlets dealing with the libertarian ideal. 1930 would see the centenary of the birth of the great French geographer and thinker, Elisée Reclus, Di Giovanni's favourite writer. Curious that much a

die-hard pacifist as Reclus should be taken so to the heart of a man who made violence his daily bread. Taken so much to his heart that Di Giovanni planned to publish the complete works of the author of the *Ecrits Sociaux* with commentaries.

To attempt this while on the run from the police, in a totally hostile environment without finance seemed a more than gargantuan task. Di Giovanni had in mind a de luxe edition and a popular edition as well, although the popular edition, too, would be illustrated.

To this end he called upon Aldo Aguzzi's help and began to maintain an intense correspondence with comrades in Uruguay, France and the United States who would be in a position to collate materials and offer him advice enabling him to bring out a model edition of Reclus's works. In this connection, his greatest assistance came from Luigi Fabbri and Hugo Treni, anarchist intellectuals living as exiles in Montevideo.

The seemingly fantastic plan for a printshop of his own from which to put out the fortnightly magazine and Reclus's complete works was carried into effect with an iron will. It required a lot of finance, but Di Giovanni had not a single centavo to his name. How was he to get around that problem? Simple. He had merely to apply anarchist 'expropriation'. Armed robbery. He was to carry it out himself in company with the men who would follow him into the jaws of Hell itself—his unwavering Paulino Scarfó, Jorge Tamayo Gavilán (known for his humour and imperturable sangfroid), Paco González, Mario Cortucci, Braulio Rojas, Roberto Lozada, Juan Marquez, José Nutti, Fernando Malvicini, Praxedes Garrido, Fernando Pombo, Emilio Uriondo, Humberto Lancciotti, Juan López Dumpiérrez, and a blond lad, one of Di Giovanni's favourites, young Silvio Astolfi, who was shortly to adopt an unusual role in order to assist his leader.

They began to acquire weapons for their raids—Colt .45s, a calibre of pistol unusual in this kind of action and one which the police did not have access to.

Di Giovanni's emotional life was one of trials and tribulations. Teresina was living in Avellaneda. Her home was under constant police surveillance but the Prisoners' Aid Committee managed to get help to her on a consistent basis. Severino knew that to visit her there, would be to walk into a deadly trap. Josefina had successfully enrolled for her 5th year of studies at the high school, but her parents and her brother Antonio kept a very close eye on her. Very rarely were the couple able to see one another and with every meeting they ran incalculable risks. Rendezvous arrangements had to be kept vague. Severino wrote, for example, "I will wait for you on Monday from 7am in San Isidro station, in the place you know. . . " Di Giovanni who was never off the front pages of the newspapers, a man credited with unparalleled savagery, was standing patiently in wait for his beloved, hour after hour like a love-struck teenager.

He planned to free Alejandro Scarfó and to get him out to Europe along with América Josefina. But if Josefina was to be able to leave the country of her own volition (she was still a minor) and not to be returned to the parental home in the event of her running into problems with the authorities, Di Giovanni would have to come up with some plan. He did. He came up with a scheme well suited to his characteristic flouting of every bourgeois bond and law. Josefina would no longer be under parental control if she married. Of course, marriage with Severino was out of the question. Who, then? Quite simply, she would marry with Silvio Astolfi, Di Giovanni's unquestioning disciple.

As it was planned, so it happened, like something from a novel. Josefina was to tell her parents that she had fallen in love with Silvio Astolfi and wanted to get married without delay. Her parents yielded to her wishes, in the belief that the marriage would place her beyond the influence of Di Giovanni. But it was not all plain sailing. In this connection, Josefina was to write to Severino on February 23, 1930, "My blond love, I got your letter, so full of the love that I believe is mine because I need it. It really is a pity not to have known that you were also in the park. By a coincidence I was thinking about you at the time (as ever). But telepathy was at work and each of us was thinking about the other at the same moment. I am writing to you in pencil because I am unbelievably nervous. Had I been writing in ink I should by now have had to strike out everything I had written. Poor Silvio is much more of a worrier than he should be and I, demanding as ever, pester him and pester him with questions until he has had enough. I realise that I am too impatient, but . . . is not my frame of mind understandable? Darling, if you were able to see how scandalised are the folk who make up "my family" . . . with their "how indecent this girl's impatience is", and "this is not normal" and, "what a scandal! Such haste and impatience to have him."

"You well know", she continues, "my darling, that your triumphs, be they moral or material are shared by me as much as your misfortunes. The severe lesson you have taught these pseudo-anarchists and the pure climate you say is on the way, find a happy echo in me who wishes you every possible triumph in your struggle for the ideal."

The marriage would go ahead. Josefina was to move in with Teresina, to await Severino's 'master stroke', the one that would secure the release of her brother Alejandro. Then they could escape to Europe.

During 1930 the police were to credit Di Giovanni with five hold-ups, three of which seem on the evidence to have been his work. The other two were carried out by Jorge Tamayo Gavilan.

The first of the hold-ups was a raid on the Bank of Avellaneda . . . a master stroke of daring and coordination, but it yielded no money.

It was a very risky venture. The Bank of Avellaneda, located at Avenue Mitre on Montes de Oca, was all but 'cut off' by a continuous stream of omnibuses, taxis, cars and carts of every description, mostly horse drawn. Because of roadworks all of the traffic diverted away from the Puente Pueyrredon, flowed right past it. The flow of traffic was so heavy at the time of the raid that there was a policeman on that corner directing traffic. The banks opened at 10.00am and of the four corners there at the junction, three were occupied by banks so that, by 9.45am there were compact groups of would-be customers collected around their doors. That was the time that Di Giovanni and his comrades drove up in two sedan cars. Two men got out and two remained in the cars. The others walked in through the staff entrance and assumed positions controlling the first customer services level, while they escorted the assistant manager over to the safe to open it. Everything was going perfectly. It was taking a long time to get to the safe, however, because several doors had to be opened before it could be reached. But in a bank there are lots of people. A bank messenger had been watching the whole thing and slipped out through a window. Avellaneda's main police station was only three blocks away. He sprinted towards it as if he had just discovered his real mission in life. Reaching the police station, he lived up to his new vocation: the inspector on duty quickly realised he wasn't lying. Out rushed the police, armed to the teeth.

But the "man dressed in black" knew what he was about, and outside the bank was young Silvio Astolfi who was no fool. Through the sea of carts and buses he saw several cars approach, all of them sounding their horns in an attempt to force a passage. Clinging to their running boards were several 'representatives of the authorities' in menacing poses and brandishing weapons.

Word was passed in a flash. Di Giovanni was just turning the last key in the final lock and could not help hesitating: there were over two million pesos in there. A shot rang out, fired by Silvio Astolfi, to signal that the police were upon them. They all rushed out into the street The pale-faced bank employees were convinced that their monotonous lives were about to end.

As the raiders scrambled into their cars the police were only 25 yards away but stuck in a confusion of carts loaded with timber and crowded buses belching diesel smoke.

The anarchists had no such problems. They had two drivers like MGM stunt men. In the course of the chase the suspense became acute. The police were never more than ten yards from them but could not use their guns without killing carters, teamsters, horses and working girls. The situation contained such elements of farce that the anarchists made fools of the agents of authority. As the police drivers' reflexes were less supple than the anarchists', the latter escaped, albeit it without a single peso.

In the second hold-up, at La Central bus station at the corner of Segurola and Velez Sarsfield Street, Di Giovanni and five of his men netted 17,500 pesos from the bus company.

That was on Friday June 20 1930, a little before noon. The raid had been prepared by Tamayo Gavilan (who was already striking out on his own) but at the last minute he had decided not to go through with it. Then Di Giovanni, Emilio Uriondo, Lanciotto, Malvicini, López Dumpiérrez and Silvio Astolfi adopted the scheme. Astolfi was the driver whilst Di Giovanni remained outside (the key position in hold-ups since it was up to him to cover their get-away). The other four made for the cashier's office. Everything went off at top speed without a single shot fired, but when the four raiders emerged with the money it was to find Di Giovanni engaged in a furious exchange of gunfire. Someone fired on him from the windows of an office building opposite, and Severino was shooting in every direction. For all the gunfire, no one was hurt.

With respect to the second hold-up, inspector general Santiago, chief of detectives, stated that it had been the work of anarchists who, "have lately been specialising in daring hold-ups."

Two days later something happened which was talked about for several days, something described as "a veritable feat by Severino Di Giovanni."

According to police and newspaper accounts, on the night of June 22, Di Giovanni was dining along with three of his comrades in the Italian restaurant belonging to Domingo Grabino at 285 Pedro Goyena Street. An anonymous telephone caller tipped off police to this effect. They surrounded it with a huge deployment of officers.

La Prensa records, "The detectives entered the eating-house in a body. Di Giovanni who was sitting in a chair with a good view of the door, recognised them at a glance and crying a warning stood up, drawing a pistol from his jacket. Simultaneously he made a rapid withdrawal, vanishing through one of the internal doors of the place."

The fugitive—how, no one knows—managed to give the police cordon the slip and starred in the next developments which *La Nación* described in two columns entitled, "Di Giovanni's Cynicism". "On every occasion that he was arrested Di Giovanni had given evidence of spectacular cynicism. So it was that on the occasion of the bombing of the City Bank he notified police that the material damage caused and victims claimed by the outrage were 'a source of delight' to him. Yesterday, too, he could not resist making fools of the police who had him but trapped for a few moments. In a fresh display of cynicism and perhaps also his rashness, about ten minutes after escaping capture he picked up a telephone (which, judging by the speed with which he was connected must have been somewhere in the vicinity) and put a call through to the Pedro Goyena restaurant,

where it was answered by one of the policemen. Thus Di Giovanni made fools of the police, crowing his delight at the ease with which he had managed to slip through the cordon and, furthermore, went on to make various threats against the representatives of the authorities. Then he abruptly replaced his receiver before police could trace the source of the call."

The newspapers now had enough material to keep them going for some days and some of them poked fun at the inability of the police to catch Di Giovanni, who always gave them the slip. Thus in the "Echoes of the Day" column of *El Mundo* (June 25 1930) under the caption, "Know the Cloth" the following appeared:

"Severino Di Giovanni is a formidable sort. He belongs to the school of Roscigna, Silveyra and other celebrated fugitives whom sceptics are already inclined to regard as inventions by the police, to excuse their inefficiency. Look at it this way: Who is this Rosigna? Does he exist or not? But no, this Di Giovanni fellow really does exist. Our valiant policemen proved that on Monday, for they saw him, watched him put his hands up, cornered him and—then let him escape. What a cheek, this Di Giovanni has, a real rascal. That he should escape is fair enough, but it seems despicable to us that he should capitalise upon his being bigger than them and frighten the detectives into believing that he was about to hurl a bomb at them, in the way that heartless parents terrify their children with tales of the bogeyman. Frankly, Di Giovanni was quite naughty. He has no right to behave so badly."

The figure of Di Giovanni had become so popular that even *Felix the Cat* took him up. In the strip printed on July 1 1930 *Felix the Cat* was walking along a country road exclaiming, "What a glorious day! I'm as free as Severino Di Giovanni!" And, behind him, at the roadside stood a notice reading . . . "Watch out for the bombs."

But, in the last analysis, Di Giovanni had suffered a defeat. Three of his best comrades, Emilio Uriondo, Umberto Lanciotto and José López Dumpiérrez had been arrested in the restaurant on Pedro Goyena, even if they had—"put up a bitter fight' as *La Prensa* noted. Now the police had something to go on. It was just a question of 'softening' them up a bit. Because police prestige was at stake here, as *La Prensa* pointed out, "the staff of the investigations branch feel concerned by the telephoned threats of Severino Di Giovanni." But it would appear that nothing the police could come up with did them any good, for a few days later *La Prensa* said that, "the three prisoners have clammed up entirely and their lips have parted only in order to offer some insults to the police."

Hard men, obviously. But inspector Santiago was not giving up. Public opinion and the chief of police demanded results, something concrete.

Emilio Uriondo has told how it was so important for police to discover something about Di Giovanni, that he was moved from the police station to the Central

Police Department. There his handcuffs were removed and he was taken to the offices of no less than Inspector Santiago. "The fact is that when I stood in front of Santiago," Uriondo told us, "I felt quite an important captive although I had no idea how far they wanted to go."

After offering Uriondo a cigarette, the chief of detectives put his big offer to him, "Look, nothing will happen to you. We're going to free you right here and now and we'll leave you be, absolutely, but you must tell us where Di Giovanni is."

Three hours later, Santiago sent for Uriondo again and put the same offer of freedom to him, although by now his demands were much more modest; he would settle for any information, any detail, somewhere where Di Giovanni might have gone, somewhere where he might be.

But he was wasting his time. Their loyalty cost Lanciotti, Uriondo and López Dumpiérrez three years in Ushuaia, "for withholding information."

But the most interesting point about the whole thing is that the man who escaped from the restaurant on Pedro Goyena was not Severino Di Giovanni at all, but Fernando Malvicini. In their zeal to lay hands on the Italian anarchist, somehow, somewhere, the police mixed the pair up: this confusion grew when the real Severino Di Giovanni spoke to them by telephone only minutes later: Di Giovanni who was calling from a house very near Pedro Goyena had been warned of what had happened by Malvicini and telephoned police in the restaurant in order to taunt them and to threaten them with dire consequences unless they released his captured comrades.

On August 7 1930, Di Giovanni carried out his long-awaited 'coup'—the attack aimed at freeing Alejandro Scarfó and those others of his comrades imprisoned in Caseros prison. Di Giovanni realised that if he could bring this off, it would change his life. Everything had been made ready at the French end; they were expecting him to arrive and set up home with Josefina. There he would begin a new life in an anarchist cooperative colony, where he would be closer to his beloved Italy. All of the preparations had been completed, down to the final detail. Di Giovanni knew that his life was in the balance yet again. He had the assistance of the taciturn Paulino Scarfó, ready to fight for his imprisoned brother's life: and of Jorge Tamayo Gavilán, a man who was never happier than when he was risking his life; and of Braulio Rojas. At 1.30pm, the prison van transporting prisoners from Caseros to the courts pulled up. Di Giovanni had been tipped off (by a friendly lawyer) that it would be carrying Alejandro Scarfó and Gomez Oliver. Despite the heavy guard on the vehicle, the anarchists managed to stop it. Hollywood style. Their car pulled out abruptly in its path and the driver of the prison van was forced to brake. A furious struggle ensued. While the other three

kept the police escort at bay Di Giovanni found the keys and opened the doors to the little cells. But they were not there! The only sound was the shrieking of women and some exclamations in Yiddish. The only prisoners in the van were three prostitutes and a member of the Zwi Migdal white slavers' organisation.

All that courage and daring, for nothing. But no time for regrets. They had to make their getaway without delay, for the police, alerted, were almost upon them.

More copy for the newspapers. Every one of them attributed the raid (correctly, on this occasion) to Severino Di Giovanni.

Crítica was to carry an odd item entitled "Chaplinesque Di Giovanni" in which it was stated, "Indisputably Di Giovanni has a strong and original personality. He has no need to put a signature to his spectacular raid or his stupendous teasing of the police for one to recognise him as a unique artist. When, just a few seconds after the raid yesterday, detectives came across the broken prison van with its driver and turnkey in a dead faint, they exclaimed in tones that might well have betokened admiration, "Di Giovanni! Di Giovanni!"

But, no discredit to his original personality, this Di Giovanni has the talent and the opportunities to imitate Chaplin, forever holding the constabulary up to ridicule.

If there had been an impartial spectator watching yesterday's raid they would have thought of Chaplin when the turnkey inside the van poked his head out of the window in the naive belief that this was no attack but only a traffic accident . . . As one might expect, Di Giovanni seized the opportunity of the proffered head to knock out its owner.

Only Di Giovanni could have reproduced this chaplinesque scene on the streets of this city of ours."

Deep down, such incidents delighted the ordinary public, and appealed to the latent rebellion which the ordinary person carries inside him but which he takes care to keep concealed.

But in point of fact, the raid on the prison van spelt death for Di Giovanni. Everything had turned sour just when everything had seemed to be going perfectly. This failure was a tremendous hitch to his plans. He had determined to honour his promise to free Alejandro Scarfó. Now he knew it would be even harder to do that. The guards would be doubled or they would move Scarfó to another jail or send him to Ushuaia. Nonetheless, Di Giovanni set to work the very next day on a new plan; he would have to blast his way into Caseros jail. This would be a carefully coordinated plan of attack, with twelve men in different observation and attack positions outside the jail, coordinated with the imprisoned anarchists

on the inside. But this plan was one which he was never to have the chance of implementing for tragedy struck before the opportunity arose.

Di Giovanni did not take the view that the slurs, "agent of fascism or of the police", offered and continuing to be offered by *La Protesta* had been wiped out by López Arango's death. He wanted anarchists themselves to define most clearly whether or not he deserved such harsh judgements. To this end he invited an international jury of leading anarchist thinkers to deliver their judgement upon his actions. It was a slow and laborious business, setting up this jury. Abad de Santillán was asked to supply copies of everything that *La Protesta* had published against Di Giovanni; this was done and the copies were sent off to jurors. The jury, formed in Montevideo, comprised Luigi Fabbri, Hugo Treni and T. Gobbi and its final declaration was severely critical of the terms employed by *La Protesta.* It pointed out that, "comrade Di Giovanni is cleared of all suspicion", but its judgement did contain one paragraph in which it noted that such excesses of language (as those employed by *La Protesta*) were typical of the intense struggle in which anarchists were engaged. This closing comment failed to satisfy Di Giovanni who was to complain that the jury had not been as precise and authoritative in its pronouncements as the anarchist ideal required.

In May 1930—freed by the decree of Hipólito Yrigoyen—the 'martyr' Simon Radowitzky, a veritable saint to the anarchists, arrived in Montevideo after serving twenty years in Ushuaia. On July 6 Radowitzky wrote to Di Giovanni, giving his opinion of the terms employed by *La Protesta*, "There are those in our ranks who must be made to see reason; some progress has been made in this direction and we shall see whether our anarchist press is to be used exclusively for propaganda and for the workers movement. Enough of this recourse to the sort of charlaton weaponry of the communists—reading a communist newspaper is sickening. For the sake of our dignity we should be somewhat above intrigues of that sort. I know what has happened to you. Some comrades here filled me in on the situation. You are right. There are times when it is impossible to ignore certain sorts of pettiness."

Reading this letter from his 'comrade Simon", Di Giovanni felt vindicated yet again. But although the leading lights of anarchism disagreed with *La Protesta*'s intensive campaign against him, that campaign was making itself felt. No new recruits came to Di Giovanni's group. Those around him were those he had always had about him and even they were being whittled away, arrested in the course of the fierce battle against the police.

IX. The last battle

In a proud and manly attitude and not on our knees.

S. Di Giovanni, May 22 1929

But on September 6 1930 when the army under General Uriburu overthrew the Yrigoyen regime things changed for everybody. The anarchists who had launched so many attacks upon aged president Yrigoyen realised within a few days that, for all his faults, he had let them hold on to their freedom of expression and association. Now they were to enjoy none of that. Under Uriburu it was Ushuaia, house arrest, newspapers banned and meetings vetoed. And for anyone who played the fool, the firing squad.

At the time everybody was living out a charade. Everybody, politicians, professional people, labour leaders, artists, writers, employees, the ordinary man in the street . . . they all wanted to be able to dress up for a time in a uniform, to share in that military feeling and to stand to attention and salute the new regime. Such was the adulation that military men began to feel themselves indispensable, saviours of the homeland. This belief of theirs was to remain with them for decades.

Such was the enthusiasm and delirium of the average Argentinian in September 1930 that *Crítica* was unable to resist carrying on its front page in letters of a size usually reserved for catastrophes . . . "REVOLUTION! What a splendid spectacle! Oppression and squalid tyranny are dispelled by the supreme cry. All of the timeless hatred of Tyranny, the hatred which struck down Rosas seemed to boil again, as if the voice of our ancestors spoke on our behalf!" (Months later, Uriburu was to ban the paper with one stroke of his pen).

No one shrank from welcoming their new president, this general with his splendid moustaches. Even the poetess Alfonsina Storni found it necessary to compose paeans of praise and, in passing, to box the ears (in verse, of course) of the gaunt figure of Yrigoyen, the Radical caudillo. Everybody cast aside all restraint, even sports columnists like *Crítica*'s "Last Reason" who penned this metaphorical epitaph for Don Hipólito Yrigoyen, "The people of Buenos Aires have just donned the four ounce gloves in order to knock out their oppressor and cacique with a straight right."

Most of the leading anarchists were obliged to flee to Uruguay. His comrades urged Di Giovanni to get out of the country and go to Montevideo which was a centre of anarchist propaganda and where he had many friends.

But, a rebel to the last, Di Giovanni took real pleasure in defying the danger.

Although the terror of the labour movement, Rear-Admiral Hermelo was now appointed police chief, Di Giovanni carried on with his plans as if the country was still in the long easygoing siesta of radical rule.

It was at this gloomy time that the first volume of Reclus's complete works saw the light of day . . . coloured binding, a cheap edition with illustrations and commentary, choice filigree work, 2,000 copies in edged paper, and the original print-run (not intended for sale) comprising 100 copies on special paper and numbered from 1 — 100.

It was Di Giovanni's greatest (and last) delight. He sent copies of this first volume to all of his friends and to anti-fascist organizations abroad. Into these pages he had poured the pesos snatched from the *La Central* bus company.

The third chapter opened with an epigram from Elisée Reclus:

"The comrade who lies in order to save a friend does well to lie. The revolutionary who engages in expropriation in order thereby to serve the needs of his friends can allow himself to be described as thief with equanimity and without resentment; the man who kills in defence of the cause of the weak murders with good reason."

Dismissing the risk of the death penalty, Severino carried out his second great hold-up on October 2 1930, a wages snatch from the *Obras Sanitarias* on the nurseries in Palermo. The nation's press and public opinion were caught unawares by his daring. The raid took place at a spot not 50 yards from where an entire company of mounted police was engaged in shooting practice, and there were upwards of 200 infantry troops only 100 yards beyond them. Everything turned out quite easily for the raiders. (Di Giovanni himself had snatched a revolver from the hand of one of the pay clerks just as he was preparing to shoot and seized a briefcase containing the money from another). Then a bitter gun-battle erupted between the raiders and the raided. Paco Gonzalez fell dead. He was a young man of whom Di Giovanni was very fond since he had acted as his go-between with Josefina for many months. One of the payclerks and the driver were also killed. They had netted 286,000 pesos—quite a figure at that time. Now at last he would be able to set up the dreamed-of presses for his publishing ventures.

On October 12 1930, a young couple, Señor Mario Dionisi and Señora Josefina Rinaldi de Dionisi signed a lease on the villa Ana Maria in Burzaco, agreeing a rent with the landlord, engineer Italo Chiocci. It stood in considerable grounds, 100 metres by 300 metres, just off the Belgrano Road. There was a spacious house and various outhouses. The woman's brother, one Luis Rinaldi, would be living with the couple.

The following day Luis Rinaldi turned up at the Curt Berger company where he purchased a complete workshop for photogravure work, with plates and all

manner of printing equipment. These he paid for in cash. It was all delivered to the cottage Ana Maria in Burzaco. At the same time new furniture, an extensive library, books, tools and so forth were delivered to the house.

In the days that followed two men would be seen sowing maize at the rear of the grounds and, later, constructing a chicken coop. They rose at dawn and worked through until noon. Then, as evening fell, they would retire indoors.

The Dionisi family were none other than Severino Di Giovanni and Josefina Scarfó; Luis Rinaldi was Paulino Scarfó. By evening, Severino used to read the proofs of the second volume of Reclus's complete works as well as scrutinize and write for the fortnightly *Anarchia* which he published along with Aldo Aguzzi. He also planned to publish Nino Napolitano's book on the German libertarian philosopher, Max Stirner. The plan was to bring it out simultaneously with volume 2 of Reclus's works.

In one of the rooms, converted into a laboratory, Paulino Scarfó was experimenting with some new smoke bombs which were to be used in the attack on the jail in Caseros, in an attempt to free his brother, Alejandro.

In addition, work went on at the installation of the press and a photogravure workshop. At nights up to fifteen men would visit the house for theoretical discussions and conversation about escape plans. And so day followed day.

Meanwhile the first victims had been claimed by the firing squads which had been established under the *Bando Rivoluzionario.* In Rosario, the anarchist Joaquin Penina who had been distributing subversive leaflets and had resisted arrest was shot dead; in Avellaneda, two petty thieves were shot by firing squad, tied to a bench in the courtyard of the police station. José Gatti and Gregorio Galeano were their names and their deaths had been ordered by the provincial police supremo, Major José W. Rosasco (who was to die a few months later in an anarchist attack). There were also three anarchist taxi drivers: Ares, Galloso and Montero, sentenced to death for having beaten up a colleague who blacklegged during a work stoppage. These three were pardoned at the last minute by a decree of the P.E. (executive power) and handed over to the civil courts.

But, despite the firing squads and the carte blanche which the minister Sanchez Sorondo had given police, the hold-ups continued and Di Giovanni continued to evade capture. At this point Tamayo Gavilan struck out on his own. On Monday, December 1 he and his group raided the shoe factory of Bauzo, Braceros y Compania, at 462 Catamarca Street at llam. The raid netted 22,800 pesos and cost the life of the factory paymaster, Francisco Gonzalo.

This latest escapade threw the police into a total crisis. "The assistant police chief in Buenos Aires, Alvaro Alsogaray (a confident of Uriburu) weary of criticism directed at him because of the escalation of unsolved crimes, resigned his post. Alsogaray's resignation toppled Rear-Admiral Ricardo Hermelo; Colonel Enrique

Pilotto replaced him. The Central Police Department was reorganised. Inspector Etcheverry who had been replaced on September 6 1930 was reappointed. When Etcheverry arrived at work it was to applause and cheering from his officers and constables. The division's name was even changed: henceforth it would be known as the General Prefecture of Police.

After his father had an interview with president Uriburu, Inspector Leopoldo Lugones (junior) was appointed commissar of police. Lugones would have charge of the entire Political Bureau. And those who knew him well knew that he would bring down the sword of retribution on anything that smacked of anarchism, syndicalism or the like. If the Homeland was to be saved the methods of the Holy Inquisition would have to be utilised without faltering. Lugones (junior) had been director of the reform school at Olivera—a position from which he had been retired by Hipólito Yrigoyen when the courts got to hear of allegations of torture and ill-treatment of his pupils. Now the Uriburu government called him back and reimbursed him some 22,000 pesos in salary lost during his suspension and appointed him to eradicate anarchism and all anti-patriotic scum. "The fun is over", said the nationalists: "Watch out for what is to come", said the radicals, socialists, anarchists and syndicalists.

But Di Giovanni ignored the warnings. For him, now was the time to act, now as never before. Something was aflame in the turbulent blood of the man in the black suit and broad brimmed hat. His answer to Leopoldo Lugones (junior) was action. He said as much in his editorial in *Anarchia* when he announced that his paper was back again after several weeks of enforced absence.

"The truce ends.

"Recent developments—the martial law presented to us by the great September 'revolution', the state of siege that has been oppressing us these four months now, the constant trespasses against our freedoms—the freedom to live, think, express oneself, the freedom to criticise, and, most lately the muzzling of the press . . . these are the reasons behind brief suspension of our publication schedules.

"It was a suspension which we very reluctantly, very grudgingly had to put up with: the printer refused to print our paper, intimidated by all of the ignominies of the emergency legislation. That is only human nature. The jackboot does not joke. Printshops and periodicals know only too well what military dictatorship means, and in truth the military dictatorship of General Uriburu is not of the sort that one might describe as indulgent. It is not worth our while to catalogue here the daily tally of its crimes against the rights of the press. What is the use? Or has history perhaps forgotten to note what has been happening in Rosario, Santa Fe, Córdoba and other places of lesser importance? Or maybe it is possible to hide the constant muzzling of opinion? And the orators forcibly removed from the rostrum for having preached—oh no! not anarchy!— no, just the most elementary

notions of constitutionality? The likes of Mario Bravo, Alfredo Palacios or Federico Cantoni are no anarchists. Indeed, yesterday they were and today they remain the staunchest advocates of the more or less democratic laws of the Argentine Republic. If the knotted gag tightens around their throats today, then let us state as a matter of fact that the 'game' will not rest content with that. Others have already forged other paths.

"From the earliest days of the 'revolution', anarchists began their trek through moral tragedy along the paths of pain—the deportations, the exile, the imprisonment, the ghastly persecution and the shootings. Such is the lot of anarchists today. Just as it was yesterday and will be tomorrow.

"All of the rancour, all of the vengeance, all of the promises seek satisfaction and relief on the morrow of 'revolutions' which revolutionise appetites.

"Not that we expected anything different. We know that the 'anti-Yrigoyen revolution' was the Uriburista revolution. We are always glib prophets when it comes to certain revolutions along the lines of—"off the throne, you, and let me sit on it." Glib prophets, regretably.

"Our paper was unable to appear again after No 11, the issue of October 1. We pulled out all the stops and approached more than one printer. We promised them the moon but nobody wanted to print our periodical for us. We tried everywhere and in the end we found one. Now the paper will appear regularly, which is to say every fortnight.

"To facilitate its distribution, we have looked for a small, convenient format. The format will be no impediment to our saying all we feel that we must, all that we intend to do, what we defend most steadfastly . . . the anarchist ideal and anarchist action.

"And so we have called off the truce. Once more this heretical sheet will race through the hands of friend and foe. A periodhas ended . . . another is just beginning and we sense ourselves that it will be a longer one with a desire for fresh battles, and with strength enough to resist, with a supple arm ready to rally to the defence.

"Anarchy will again come to be synonymous with youth. It will again act against the state of affairs which suffocates and destroys us, in order to resist and always to resist. To defend that which is ours—liberty, the right to life, the right to what we require in the realm of the material and in the realm of the spiritual.

"And if, in this constant, tenacious struggle, we should fall, we shall at least have the satisfaction of falling with our weapons in our hands.

"And with the youth—which is not counted in years but rather in the ever-new enthusiasm for resistance and attack—we shall go towards courage and daring.

Anarchia"

In that same re-launch number of *Anarchia* we find an appeal signed by one Mario Vando; this was Severino Di Giovanni's nom de guerre. The police already had him on record as Mario Vando, but Di Giovanni insisted on using this alias so that his comrades who read the paper would know that it was his writings they were reading and that he was still in the struggle, despite all of the persecution. the article is headed . . . "Action!" . . . and is written in Di Giovanni's characteristic style . . . overwhelming, romantic, insistent . . . the sort of thing that best finds its echo among the young and idealistic . . .

"Action! . . .

"If there is one watchword we must etch upon the red banner of our rebellion; if there is one exclamation of rage and incitement we should roar into space; if there is one phrase we must ring out loud and clear on the anvil of the most steely reality, then it can only be, in these dismal days:

"Action!..

"And we are yet in time.

"The high tide of international reaction is rising at a dizzying rate. It threatens to flood all of our defences beyond remedy.

"This black and bloody reaction, cynical and murderous, sadistic and obscene has set out along its career with a clear view of our goals which it has to bring down to annihilate, to raze and kill every seed of resurrection.

"All around us we see only the gleam of bayonets and the flash and fire of rifles, and jails wide open to receive us and bury us alive, gibbets raised to hang us on, terror spreading all around, butchery committed even in the remotest corners, violations of human rights flung in everyone's face—in short, we are surrounded by the most awful destruction and oppression.

"These lines are not the results of annoyance or a hangover. Nor are they a distortion of the facts. No, they simply spell out what we have been noticing for some time, something which will end whenever we rush headlong at the walls of despotism.

"Stirring the human spirit, rebelling at this dark hour, avenging those who have been crushed beneath the burden of barbarism and bourgeois tyranny . . . these must be the overwhelming duties of every revolutionary, today, tomorrow, always.

"At our disposal we have a thousand weapons more powerful than those used by the spirit of statism; weapons which place the chemistry and the intelligence of the individual at our disposal: we merely have to forearm ourselves with the subtlest of circumspection, and a whole gamut of precautions and to be distrustful even of our own mothers before and after we set to our work.

"We can—if we so wish—crush their rule beneath the powerful mace of our blessed wrath, we can smash it and overturn it with the avalanche of our rebellion.

"The time is right..today!

"Let us hammer furiously against all the walls of oppression. With our weapons of vindication, let us scratch the call to "Action!" on all of the bulwarks of the State's defences.

"Let us shape and weave into our blood and fibres the new rebel consciousness which must revive our dignity, so vilified and spat upon.

"With the strength of all our being, let us raise the torch of faith, the light of the ideal and the revolutionary virtues which have always been our movement's finest hopes.

"To action!

"To avenge the fallen, every one, and to free those menaced by the wrath of every reactionary. . .

"And let us bear it ever in mind that one word only can do honour to the fallen, to the martyrs, heroes and our ideal. . . that word is: ACTION!

Mario Vando."

X. The End

> Sirius, points the way with a smile and I hasten anxiously towards my fate, with his kiss upon my forehead . . .
>
> S. Di Giovanni, December 31 1929

In the villa Ana Maria life took its everyday course: there was the work on the house and tending the poultry until noon, with the rest of the day spent reading, writing and experimenting with smoke bombs in preparation for the projected attack on the jail at Caseros, with the aim of releasing Alejandro Scarfó. Comrade Errico had written to Di Giovanni from France to tell him that everything was ready for their arrival: a down payment had been paid on a plot of land where Di Giovanni was planning to set up an anarchist cooperative colony which would concentrate on producing honey and farm produce. Errico was expecting Fina Scarfó and her brother, Alejandro to arrive first, ahead of Di Giovanni who was to follow. The latter would not find it so easy to travel without being recognized. Anyway, before leaving for France, he was keen to publish several volumes by his favourite writers. This would require two or three more 'jobs', despite Uriburu, Sanchez Sorondo and Lugones (junior).

Laura, Di Giovanni's eldest daughter had moved into the villa. Josefina Scarfó had brought her there for the holidays. The location was attractive, a villa set among ancient trees and the scents of the countryside on the breeze. When night fell, the neighbours could see the Dionisi couple strolling the village, wandering far and conversing long.

At the beginning of January 1931, a leaflet entitled "Notice to Quit" began to circulate. The authors of the text gave Uriburu and Sanchez Sorondo until January 20 to surrender power, upon pain of being sentenced to death. They went on to announce that January 20 would be the date of the launching of a terrorist campaign against all businesses and entrepreneurs.

Di Giovanni was credited with authorship of this leaflet, but in fact he had had nothing to do with it. It was a Radical scheme dreamed up by Oyhanarte—a former minister under Yrigoyen, living as an exile in Montevideo—who had a helping hand from an agent provocateur, so-called anarchist Garcia Thomas. The leaflet circulated widely and one of the people who decided to exploit the tension created by the "Notice to Quit" was Di Giovanni. At a meeting in Burzaco it was decided that once the deadline had expired, the group would go into action with

dynamite attacks in order to create a widespread climate of despair and disquiet and to rock the government.

Di Giovanni and his people knew that, for all their bluster, the Radicals were not about to lift a finger and would simply remain in hiding or fall to their knees. But not Di Giovanni.

On the morning of January 20 three very powerful bombs exploded. Paulino Scarfó planted one in the underground station in the Plaza Once; Cortucci planted a second device in the Maldonado station belonging to the Argentine Central Railway Company. Marquez deposited the third at Constitucion Street. Damage was substantial: there were twenty people injured—four were killed. Fear stalked the streets. The government saw the bombings as a gauntlet flung down before it and believed that the bombers were only part of a wider, far-reaching conspiracy. Every single newspaper, without exception, talked about an anarchist-Radical conspiracy led by Oynaharte from Montevideo. Taking personal charge of investigations, Inspector Leopoldo Lugones junior traveled to Uruguay. The police prepared a massive dragnet of Buenos Aires and took one measure which delivered results . . . all printshops were placed under surveillance. That is how they came to search the one at 3747 Corrientes Street, the Talleres Graficos Ciudad de Buenos Aires, where Mario Cortucci was arrested. Now the police had a lead—they knew for a fact that Cortucci was one of the Italian anarchists who worked with Severino Di Giovanni.

Investigations centred on the figure of Cortucci and to him were applied the new 'methods' which, rumour had it, Inspector Lugones had introduced to the police armoury.

Di Giovanni was tipped off about the arrest of Cortucci, but he had every confidence in his comrade. He was convinced that, no matter what they might do to him, he would betray no one; and so Di Giovanni stuck to his everyday routine.

On the evening of January 30 1931, Di Giovanni had just finished correcting the proofs of the second volume of Reclus's book and was in a hurry to get to Genaro Bontempo's printing works, right in the heart of the capital, in a basement at 335 Callao Street, near the corner with Sarmiento.

Paulino and Josefina called him back; it was stated in that day's newspapers that police were keeping all print-shops under surveillance in order to thwart publication of subversive leaflets, and now here was Severino about to place his head in the lion's mouth. But he refused to listen. He was in a hurry to see the completion of the work that inspired him and wanted to be the one who gave the printer his instructions in person. What remained of his life was ticking away.

Di Giovanni finished off and strode out with the printer Bontempo into the street. It was a warm evening. For the first time ever, Di Giovanni felt ill at ease in his black suit. It attracted too much attention.

At that very moment he saw someone stride right towards him and cry out: "Di Giovanni!"

No question about it: a cop. In that split second he glimpsed death, but as always faced it obstinately. He turned around and started running. Just as he reached the corner of Sarmiento Street a second man stepped out in front of him and shouted: "Hold it, Di Giovanni! Don't do anything silly!"

Severino drew out his Colt .45. Whistles were blowing now and one of the policemen shouted:

"Stop thief! Stop thief!"

A crowd milled around for a few seconds, and began to run. There was obviously going to be trouble. Everyone was racing away, Di Giovanni included.

No one knows who fired the first shot but a manhunt promptly set off through the city centre and across the roofs of Buenos Aires. According to eyewitnesses, over one hundred shots rang out during this pursuit of one man by so many. Later, Di Giovanni's defence counsel demonstrated that his client had only fired five of them.

A young girl fell after the first volley of shots. She lay between the hunters and their quarry. She scurried away desperately only to collapse, picked herself up again, and fell yet again, this time never to rise. The white dress she was wearing began to stain bright red with the blood gushing from her back.

This was the third time that Di Giovanni's fate had been crossed with that of a child. The figure of this child was to be exploited in order to make the anarchist an even more horrific figure in the eyes of the public. The police were to allege that the bullet which killed her came from Di Giovanni's gun. Di Giovanni was to deny that strenuously.

Running on, he crossed Callao Street and set off along Sarmiento Street heading west; as he reached Rio Bamba Street, policeman José Ufiz stepped out to intercept him. The anarchist shot him down with a single bullet and raced on. He headed along Rio Bamba Street. Then he stopped. The streets were absolutely deserted, like a Sunday morning around 7am. Fear had bolted all of the doors against him.

On he went, at a walk and turned into Cangallo street. They were coming for him, from Callao Street, flattened against the walls. It was all over for him. There were at least six of them, all aiming at him. Di Giovanni quickened his pace. When he made it as far as the guesthouse at 1975 Cangallo Street he saw another three or four approaching from Ayacucho. He was surrounded. He had no option but to duck into a doorway. In the hallway of the guesthouse he found the two owners, two Spaniards, absolutely panic stricken.

"Don't be afraid. I won't touch you," he told them and headed towards the little lift, only to come back along the corridor and climb the stairs. At that point they fired at him through the door to the street. So Di Giovanni doubled back, waited for a second, then fired a well-aimed shot which struck policeman Ceferino Garcia, killing him. He then hurried through the kitchen of the guesthouse. Reaching the courtyard he leaned a stepladder against a wall. Laboriously he climbed to the top, getting lime stains on his suit in the process. From there he had a complete view of the flat roofs. The other face of Buenos Aires . . . the washing hung out to dry, the old junk, the wire cages with the filthy chickens. The blackened roofs streaked with rust and age. The next roof was only three yards away. He leapt into the air. He hurt his feet when he landed, but he went on without stopping. He slid off that roof like a child down a greasy pole and landed on a verandah in the courtyard of an old house in Ayacueho Street. There was no one there. He snatched a few moments' rest and headed for the door on to the street. The darkness of the hallway was cut by a beam of light . . . a maid was peeping out at the commotion in the street. Di Giovanni pushed her gently aside and stepped out. Almost immediately, something like twenty shots were fired at him. He ran up the street, zigzag fashion and managed to make it to the junction of Sarmiento and Ayacucho Street. There he saw his path cut off and he backed down Sarmiento Street as far as Callao Street. They were shooting from every side. Hunting him down like a rabid dog. First he ducked for cover behind a tree, then darted into a garage (at number 1964). The mechanic, a man with Slavic features, froze, terrified. Di Giovanni looked at him, unseeing. He knew now that he was surrounded. Already they were shooting at him from the doorway. He fired a single shot in reply. Then he unbuttoned his jacket, pressed the muzzle of the Colt .45 to his white shirt and pulled the trigger.

The first policeman to reach the prostrate figure kicked his hand to dislodge the pistol from his grip. His shirt was all bloodstained. Inspector Garibotto ordered a doctor to be fetched; the doctor ordered Di Giovanni to be rushed to hospital. Under an extraordinary escort, he was removed to the Ramos Mejia hospital. In the ambulance, four policemen sat alongside the stretcher with guns drawn, with their free hand each of them holding him handcuffed. Behind the ambulance travelled a truck filled with policemen; both vehicles had a motorcycle escort. The motorcyclists, as *La Nación* commented, "performed the same functions as scouts at the head of an army on the march."

La Nación—which passed the comment somewhere that the chance had now come to apply the death penalty to Di Giovanni—noted:(. . .)"Di Giovanni, the stuff of which legends are made, maintained right from the incident of which he was the protagonist, the daring and uncommon energy so typical of the man and

so evident in even the most trivial details. He was known as a man of daring, possessed of imperturbable sangfroid, but no one suspected that he possessed these qualities in the same measure in which he displayed them following his arrest. When committed to the Ramos Mejia hospital he retreated into an impenetrable muteness leaving his eyes to do the talking. Lynx eyes at that. Yesterday he gazed around him with devastating tranquility, hard-eyed, unblinking. His eyes spoke a multitude of accusations and threats and his gaze raised a flicker of panic in those who steeled themselves to bear the crushing burden of that rare, strong something which he projected through his deep eyes." And, elsewhere on the same page, *La Nación* stated in an entitled . . . "A disciple of Al Capone" . . . "He was bold, he was brave, in an instinctive sort of way, more wild than human. We say "was", for he assuredly will never be the same again." Another item was headed, "A welcome capture" and said, "daring as ever, Di Giovanni had trusted too much to his bravery, as is shown by the fact that although his path was blocked on September 6 (the date of Uriburu's coup d'etat), with the fundamental change that meant to the security of those like him who lived in illegality, he decided to remain in Buenos Aires. When arrested, he refused to talk. The entire mystery of his life—a life like a character from a novel—is locked up behind those terrible eyes of his. How interesting it would be to learn the truth about that life!"

News of Di Giovanni's capture (carried by the sixth editions that day) was stirring news for all concerned. Furthermore, the evening papers were proclaiming the certainty of his being brought before a firing squad. The minister of the Interior, Matias Sanchez Sorondo took charge of the case and speeded up the transfer of the wounded Di Giovanni from hospital to prison so that he could be tried and sentenced the same morning. Sanchez Sorondo kept Uriburu informed of developments; Uriburu called his minister of war, General Medina, urging him to appoint a military tribunal immediately to try Di Giovanni. General Medina's orders were drastic . . . "in one hour a council of war of NCOs and men must convene in the national penitentiary to sit in judgement and to pronounce tonight upon the charges against Di Giovanni." Those orders were carried out. By an irony of history, the court was chaired by a soldier of Radical sympathies, Colonel Conrado Risso Patron. The prosecutor was to be Lieutenant-Colonel Clifton Goldney and the court appointed as defence counsel a first lieutenant from the corps of Archivists and Cyclists, First Lieutenant Franco.

They moved quickly. The witnesses for the prosecution were policemen—apart from one civilian who claimed to have seen nothing—and they were to testify that Di Giovanni had shot first and that he had been the one who killed the girl. The prosecutor requested the death penalty for the accused, "on record as an anarchist agitator", for having borne arms against the authorities, killing the girl

Delia Berardone, police agent Garcia and for wounding agent Uriz. Under the edict of the revolution, the prosecutor went on, these offences carried the death penalty:

Then the court recessed for fifteen minutes and the accused was taken back to the cells. When they attempted to bring him out again, Di Giovanni refused to be hand-cuffed. A furious brawl erupted, during which the anarchist was beaten with chains and truncheons by upwards of a dozen warders before they eventually managed to overwhelm him and handcuff his hands behind his back. With his prison uniform jacket torn to shreds, exposing the bandages on the wound he had sustained only a few hours earlier, Di Giovanni was hauled before the tribunal again. As there were journalists present, the chairman feared a minor scandal and produced a communique stating, "no army personnel were involved in the struggle to subdue prisoner Di Giovanni prior to his being handcuffed. . . "

But the soldiers who composed the tribunal (ten of them in all) had a surprise in store. What they had taken for granted would be a token defence case put by an undistinguished low-ranking officer was to emerge instead as a plea that set the panel of the tribunal trembling in fear for their own futures: but their verdict was specific. . . death before dawn.

First Lieutenant Franco had gone to speak with Di Giovanni during the fifteen minute recess in order to inform his 'client' of the way in which to reply to the court's questioning. But Di Giovanni merely told him, "I shall speak in only one way—truthfully. I ask only that you do not require me to lie about my ideas. I am an anarchist and I renounce no part of anarchism, not even in the face of death. I appreciate my situation and have no intention of shirking responsibilities of any kind. I gambled, I lost. Like a good loser, I shall pay with my life."

Franco went away impressed by this reply. He intended to do everything within his power to save this man's life. What follows is First Lieutenant Franco's speech for the defence, heard with surprise and then with indignation by the members of the military tribunal:

"Most excellent members of the tribunal. . . I come here without fear and without defiance to speak in the defence of a man, as I have been instructed to do as a matter of duty. First, let me speak again of my respect for the worthy soldiers who make up this tribunal. I ask their indulgence if, by reason of my being a soldier and not a man of law, I should make statements which might (being blunt and to the point) sound like effrontery. At this point I am reminded of the reply of the Conde de Campomanes to the kings of Spain when questioned regarding the causes of their financial troubles. His reply was that they were due to the irregularities of the royal court. Excusing himself, after having spoken so forthrightly, Campomanes added: May Your Excellency forgive me if I have spoken

out of turn. The same happy phrase occurs to me now, albeit that the context and the causes may be quite different. But I make that phrase my own, asking for your indulgence in advance, lest I, too, speak out of turn today."

Already these opening remarks had disquieted the tribunal's members. A flicker of concern came over the features of Colonel Risso Patron.

Unflinching, Franco continued his address, "I do not come here today with mischievous intent or perverse purpose. I am a military man, a zealot of discipline and order . . . a man motivated by a profound love of country. And because I know what this means in a world context, I speak without fear or defiance. Let me begin by challenging the competence of this tribunal. It is my belief that the offence with which Severino Di Giovanni stands accused does not fall within the competence of the tribunal. Martial law originated with the monarchies of Europe whose discipline is at odds, absolutely at odds with the discipline of republican governments. Then again, martial law is provided for only in the eventuality of serious internal upheavals, war or huge public disasters which may pose a threat to social stability. Argentina is not at war. From La Quiaca to Tierra del Fuego, from the Atlantic to the Andean caves, order prevails for all who have eyes to see. Consequently, there is no justification for the application of martial law."

The accused—the focus of every eye because of his torn jacket, which exposed the blond hair on his chest and because of his unnatural stance, muscles all tensed because of the way in which his hands had been handcuffed behind his back—had begun to watch with interest this unknown lieutenant with the pale face who was making the members of the tribunal increasingly nervous.

"Order and normality prevail in the life of the nation," the officer for the defence continued. "Out of the triumphant Revolution of September 6 rose a new government whose very first act, upon taking power, and encouraged by the warmth with which it was received by the people, was to make public expression of its respect for the Constitution of the Republic. The judiciary has retained the fullness of its rights and attributes. A soldier heads the Executive just as a civilian might. The government which rules over us is an expression of the people's wishes. There is no military dictatorship here. Thus, the procedure for dealing with common offenders is clearly prescribed. They must account for their offences before the courts. In my estimate the available evidence supports my contention that Di Giovanni did not attack the police but was, on the contrary, merely replying to their aggression."

At this point, the chairman of the tribunal called the speaker to order, asking that he stick strictly to the point. But Franco seems not to have heard him and he went on blithely, "According to the facts the accused came out of the printing works located in a basement in Callao Street. He set off towards Corrientes Street, while the owner of the works set off in the direction of Sarmiento Street. Di

Giovanni spotted detectives in the vicinity. He noted that he had been recognized: He did not attack the policeman; instead, he made a U-turn and fled in the opposite direction, the direction of Sarmiento. Another detective attempted to place him under arrest. Shots were fired at him. Di Giovanni made off along Sarmiento Street, attempting to reach Rio Bamba Street. Citizens and police joined the pursuit. Even so, Di Giovanni did not use his gun until yet another policeman tried to stop him in Rio Bamba Street between Sarmiento and Cangallo Streets. Di Giovanni ducked behind a stationary car with the policeman in hot pursuit and fired his gun only when he believed the situation hopeless. At which point, violent emotion welled up inside him. He reached the premises in Cangallo Street, slipping inside. According to the testimony of the owner, he was like a crazy man. The owner then reported to police that a crazy man had entered his place of business. That's how he described him. He can remember nothing else. How many revolvers were fired at Di Giovanni? Who could it have been that killed the poor child at the corner of Callao and Sarmiento Streets when the object of the pursuit had just fired his weapon for the first time near the Rio Bamba and Cangallo?"

At this, murmurs of disapproval were heard from the police chiefs present; among them were the sub-prefect of police, Doctor David Uriburu no less, the elder brother of the provisional president of the nation. The chairman of the tribunal tried to intervene but, in even tones, Franco continued his address . . . "For that reason I contend that Di Giovanni was not the attacker, but rather that he reacted to repulse an attack by the police. Add to this the quite proper outrage felt by the people when they learned of the wounding of the unfortunate child whose death stirred the very fibres of their hearts."

Di Giovanni continued to gaze at him, listening even more attentively as if unable to believe what he was hearing.

"Out of five witnesses," Franco went on, "four of those who have given evidence were policemen who took part in the whole episode. No ballistics report has ever been offered to prove that it was the weapon of the accused which was responsible for the girl's death. When Di Giovanni reacted, he did so against a policeman who had already laid hands on him. He struggled with him. His nerves, however steely they may be, were on edge. And in firing a shot, for the first time, at the policeman in Cangallo and Rio Bamba Street, he wounded him. It is my belief, Señor Presidente, that what we have here is an obvious case of self defence. The instinct of survival in the species is primarily dependent upon the individual's instinct whoever that individual may be. FIFTY REVOLVERS WERE BEING FIRED AT DI GIOVANNI."

First lieutenant Franco had stopped. An orator's pause. Total silence. Then, with a sweeping gesture he pointed to the accused and raised his voice. "Behold,

Di Giovanni! A tasty morsel for the violent prose of the crime reporters. And the phantasmagorical character who was the police's trump card . . . a card produced by an over-manned police force which somehow had to justify its numbers in the overall budget allocations."

Nobody dared murmur at that, because Franco was referring to police under Yrigoyen's rule.

"This honourable tribunal," he concluded, "knows that the accused has never ever been arrested or sentenced. Not even once. So he has been turned into this elusive criminal who for eight years has been based in Argentina. To admit now that Di Giovanni was a man capable of outwitting the courts, the police, the people at large and, amongst these the intellectuals engaged in helping to enforce order, would be to recognize the superiority of this man over all of the physical and moral resources of Argentina."

After another pause, during which Franco looked insolently into the eyes of every single member of the tribunal, he continued, "In his zeal to excel, man scores triumphs each day in the arts and sciences. Thus, over the centuries, he has transformed the fragile galleys which once ploughed the seas peopled by sirens, into the powerful dreadnoughts which race across the oceans today, their steel bows knifing into the blue mountains, and he has also transformed the mythical Icarus with his wings of wax into the airship. He searches the heavens through the fixed eye of his telescopes and scrutinizes distant worlds. The Moorish alchemist has given way to modern chemistry. Yet he has not been able, nor will he ever be so, to breathe life into any microscopic cell because the breath of life is wholly divine in origin. Life is a gift of God alone. Only he creates it and only He should destroy it. Man may not, with all his laws, arrogate to himself that which is the prerogative of God. The merest twinge of humanity makes us shrink from decreeing death because it would be an affront to ethics. Ethics and law have been compared to two concentric circles . . . the one restricted and perfectly well defined by men's laws and the other wider and infinite in scope, part of God's laws. Law regards itself as the ordering of time. As a result, none of the ordinances of Law may stipulate that which is repugnant to Ethics. In the light of all that I have said, Honourable Tribunal, and having said that Di Giovanni was provoked into the attack, I request that the accused be not tried under martial law. Again, I crave the indulgence of the Honourable Tribunal should it deem that I have gone too far in the defence of this man's life, moreover a task thrust upon me. My defence has been sincere and, in addressing the Honourable Tribunal, I do so with all of the integrity with which one honest man always addresses other honest men. Many thanks."

While Di Giovanni was listening, dumbfounded, to this unexpected defence plea on his behalf from a uniformed man, a truck carrying twenty-four men of the Buenos Aires police under the command of inspector Fernandez Bazan drew up a few yards away from the villa Ana Maria in Burzaco. What had happened? How had police managed to trace them in less than twelve hours? At a later stage, the head of the Political Bureau was to state that the hideout had been traced as a result of the laborious surveillance on Josefina Scarfó since the day she had paid a visit to her brother in prison. Officially, the police were to claim that they had been given the addresses of the print shop in Callao Street and of the villa in Burzaco by Mario Cortucci. Appearing later before a judge, Cortucci was to refute the allegation, claiming that he had told the police nothing . . . "despite being tortured in barbaric fashion".[18]

Even as the police were clambering down from their truck with their rifles three men emerged from Ana Maria, carrying a number of packages. It was 5.30am. These were Paulino Scarfó, Braulio Rojas and Juan Marquez. Spotting the police raiding team, they hesitated for a moment before walking on towards the oncoming police.

Fernandez Bazan then ordered his men to fan out and instructed Domingo Dedico to step forward and order the three suspects to put their hands in the air. According to the police version of what happened next, Dedico was doing just that when one of three opened fire on him; Dedico collapsed, mortally wounded: A gun battle ensued, claiming the lives of the anarchists, Braulio Rojas and Juan Marquez. After using up all of his ammunition, Paulino tried to crawl towards the villa Ana Maria, but was captured.

The police made a search of the villa, stumbling across Josefina Scarfó and little Laura Di Giovanni inside. As the pair were being taken away to the Central Police Department a huge crowd (the whole of Burzaco) gathered around the door to

[18] Some anarchist expropriators who shared a cell with Cortucci later, have told us that it was indeed Cortucci who put police on the trail to the villa 'Ana Maria', not that this was interpreted as outright informing. Cortucci's behaviour was quite logical; for days on end he had withstood savage torture without uttering a single word until at least 48 hours had passed since the time he had arranged to rendezvous with Di Giovanni at the villa. He reckoned that since he had failed to keep their appointment, Di Giovanni would have realized that something untoward had happened, and would discover that Cortucci had fallen into the hands of the police, and would flee from 'Ana Maria' along with all their possessions. But, once police had shown him a copy of the newspaper reporting Di Giovanni's capture, Cortucci believed that in any case those left behind at the villa would go into hiding without delay. So it was that Cortucci, during yet another 'softening' session with police, revealed the address of the villa, firmly believing that police would find only an empty house.
These same anarchists admitted that Di Giovanni, Paulino Scarfó and the other comrades had been doubly imprudent, first in going to the print shop although Di Giovanni knew that it might be under surveillance, and secondly, in failing to vacate the villa immediately after Di Giovanni was arrested.

the villa. Josefina halted for a moment and told them all . . . "there are more than three hundred hens and chickens in there. They, and the maize crop can go to the poor of Burzaco."[19]

Without a single dissenting voice, the military tribunal sentenced Severino Di Giovanni to death. Lieutenant Franco submitted an appeal for clemency, but this was rejected by the court. The order to have Di Giovanni shot was signed by Uriburu and General Medina.

Franco's plea for the defence caused a scandal in military circles. His arrest was ordered and then he was dismissed from the service. Some wanted to send him to Ushuaia but later Uriburu granted permission for him to flee into exile in Paraguay, from where he was able to return in 1932.[20]

Once sentenced had been pronounced, Di Giovanni was given 24 hours to prepare himself to face the firing squad. When questioned as to his last wishes (he was offered delicacies to eat and drink, but refused them) he asked them to

---

[19] Atilio Angonelli—longtime resident of Burzaco and something of an institution there—is the sole surviving eyewitness to the capture of Paulino Scarfó and the searching of the villa 'Ana Maria' and he has furnished us with some interesting details. He tells us that, upon hearing gunfire, they (a group of residents) ran to see what was going on. By the time they reached the scene Paulino Scarfó was already in hand-cuffs and against a fence. They held him there for quite a while; more people were arriving all the time. In answering questions from members of the public, police officers said that their captive was—"a frightful assassin and gunman'. Some, obviously keen to ingratiate themselves with the authorities began to shower the prisoner with insults and approached him threateningly. Fernandez Bazan let them get on with it; after all, it would help to 'soften up' the anarchist. Paulino gazed at them with indifference, but when he saw that they were about to attack, he opened his mouth to ask: 'What's your hurry? Don't you know I'm for the firing squad in the morning?'

That information, dropped almost casually, froze the belligerent members of the crowd in their tracks. They just stood there, staring at him the way one would stare at someone bound to die, someone already in death's embrace.

In his statement, Atilio Angonelli himself endorsed the actions of the police in searching the villa, and the police version of the gun battle. He told us the following:

'The fact is that I shall never forget that episode, because in the course of it I lost some champagne glasses of the finest French crystal. On the evening of that day, Inspector Foix asked whether we, the neighbours who were present in the villa 'Ana Maria', could provide him with a few champagne glasses—I promptly agreed and brought mine along. Apparently, they were to be placed there on the kitchen table so that some photographs could be taken which would make it appear as if Di Giovanni and the others in the house had been living a riotous life, indulging in orgies. (At that time champagne was the drink which above all symbolised wealth or loose licentious living). The point is that I left those glasses there, but when I returned to collect them they handed me some ordinary glasses, utterly worthless. When I protested, I was told they were the only glasses there.'

[20] The army was so indignant at Franco's speech that reprisals were even taken against the chairman of the military tribunal, Colonel Risso Patron. A decree dated February 4, 1931 relieved him of his post as chairman of the court martial for NCOs and men. He was stood down. And all because he had not shown enough vigour and allowed Franco to continue his plea on Di Giovanni's behalf.

bring his wife and children to him; and Josefina Scarfó. Finally, he said that he wished to speak one last time with Paulino Scarfó.

XI. Death

". . . Blood covers this handsome frame with roses
While the heavens sink in his eyes.
A nightingale's sweet song
And the dawn fades to a thin veil. . . "

A fragment of the poem *Viva L'Anarchia! — To the memory of Severino Di Giovanni and Paulino Scarfó, by Virgilia D'Andrea, an Italian poetess resident* in the United States. The poem was published in New York of March 28 1931 in *L'Adunata dei Refrattari.*

The last hours of Severino Di Giovanni unravelled like a play. A throng of notables who had secured entry to the prison filed past the bars of his cell watching his every move. Di Giovanni just behaved as if there was no one there watching. He realized that the whole country was living on tenterhooks until his death and that, for these twenty-four hours he would be on the centre stage, the man in the news. But when they brought Teresina and the children to him, his stoicism failed him. His hands bound, he awkwardly carressed his wife. He showered a hundred kisses on her, on his daughters and on Ilvo, his only son. Teresina caressed his face in silence, gazing into his eyes. He lifted Ilvo in his arms and hugged him while kissing the little girls. The children were blond, like their father. It was a scene of prolonged tenderness; hard to believe such tenderness in a man as hard as Di Giovanni. Then, realising that a display of emotion might humiliate him in the eyes of so many onlookers, the anarchist composed himself and started to joke with the children. The children laughed to see their father cavort so. The curiosity seekers sat stoneyeyed, without moving. . . they watched this unaccustomed spectacle of a man under sentence of death laughing with his children just a few hours away from his execution. Feverishly, journalists jotted down notes which their avid readership in Buenos Aires would devour with enthusiasm.

One hour later Josefina Scarfó was introduced to his cell. Their reunion was a very calm affair, one might even say placid. The lovers held hands and spoke to one another in hushed tones. Severino asked that Josefina, being a woman, should not pursue the struggle in the vanguard because it was a very hard life. Better that she should devote herself to the task of disseminating their ideals and publishing materials that would aid enlightenment. He told her to settle down with some good companion who shared her ideas and wished her every happiness.

The talk with Paulino Scarfó was, likewise, a very dignified affair. The two men were brought face to face, stiffened, shook hands. Both were handcuffed.

They exchanged a few calm words. They scarcely had two minutes together. In the wake of this meeting, both men were to make statements to police in which they admitted responsibility for the bomb attacks and hold-ups in recent months. Brandishing the statements, sub-prefect Uriburu was to proclaim to newspapermen, "They have admitted complete responsibility for all these offences in the hope of sparing their fellow believers or accomplices from suffering the penalty of the law . . . "

Paulino Scarfó's trial was a much briefer affair than Di Giovanni's. Matias Sanchez Sorondo had lodged energetic protests over the defence arguments raised by First Lieutenant Franco, and stated that the Army had lent itself to an attempt to offer an apologia for a foreign pistolero.

As a result, General Medina appointed as Scarfó's defence counsel a soldier of unquestionable orthodoxy . . . First Lieutenant David Armando Lavori.

But there were no hitches in the trial of 22 year old Scarfó. He wanted to die along with his beloved leader. So, from the beginning, he confessed his guilt and quite calmly stated that he had attacked the police. That was enough to ensure a death sentence.

Lieutenant Lavori's defence argument took barely two minutes to put to the tribunal. He stated, "In assuming the defence of the accused not in my capacity as an officer but as a fellow human being, I yield before an exalted humanitarian duty. It is my belief that people of this sort with their subversive and anarchistic beliefs, instead of being hauled before the courts should be committed to special sanatoria, as I regard them as abnormal creatures devoid of all humanitarian sentiment. The defendant is almost a child and for several years now has been a pawn in the hands of the ghastly criminal Di Giovanni; this has meant that the education which he received in his formative years was of the most noxious sort. In view of the complete confession made by the defendant concerning the crime of which he is accused, it only remains for me to request the tribunal that in pronouncing sentence it should display the utmost humanitarian considerations."

Then, once his client had been sentenced to die, Lavori said, " . . . as what we have here is a mental aberration, an individual who is the very archetype of a suggestible person under the sway of the will of another, I request the Señor Presidente to have the accused taken before a panel of psychiatrists for thorough examination."

When Scarfó heard 'his defender' suggest such a thing, he stood up and spoke to him in a tone quite calm and natural. "I thank you for your consideration", he said.

When the tribunal's chairman offered the accused the chance to speak in his own defence, Paulino Scarfó said simply: "Since I may not set out my beliefs and since this is, in any event, hardly the place to do so, I have nothing to say."

After the verdict had been announced, this tall, slim young man dressed in a humble, 'lobster' coloured suit (the sort available from any of the outfitters in Buenos Aires) turned around, waited patiently for the photographers to finish and, without swagger, allowed himself to be returned to the cells.

At 4.30am on February 1, Severino Di Giovanni was removed from his cell. Only a few minutes now. The fateful hour was almost upon him as was obvious from the scuffling to secure a spot opposite Di Giovanni's cell or in the corridor along which he would have to pass. There were ministers, generals and high functionaries out there. They had all pulled strings in order to gain access, lest they might miss the show. Even people who should have known better acted absurdly: the actor José Gomez hammered on the prison gates, screaming . . . "Open up in the name of art" and managed to gain admittance on the pretext that he needed to witness the deed if he was to improve as an actor[21]. Then there was

[21] Some days later, in the course of an article on Di Giovanni in *Crítica*, José Gomez (the doyen of actors at the time) gave this description of what he had seen:
'The shooting of Di Giovanni was for me a new and pungent emotional experience. I was allowed to observe him in his cell for thirty minutes. There was the celebrated Di Giovanni in his blue prison uniform, jacket open at the neck like a sports shirt and wearing down at heel shoes. As yet they had not fitted the shackles, so he was able to pace around the cell. Now and then he would lift his handcuffed hands to his head, and run his fingers through his blond mane. I watched him bite his lips and stroke his chin. He was nervous but determined not to show it so his nervousness was controlled. The minutes dragged by and the caged man seemed to wish to hurry them along by pacing up and down in his cell.
I was impressed, for never in my life had I witnessed a similar spectacle. This man, whose name struck terror into people, would go to his death just a few seconds from now. I could see him through the crude bars, his face ablaze, his eyes fixed, his glance incisive, terrible. He radiated health and this muscular body was going to be felled by the bullets of the firing squad outside in the prison yard.
Severino Di Giovanni wanted to remain calm. One could read that determination in his eyes. But even his slightest movements betrayed his nervous excitement. Suddenly, he asked:
'Aren't we going yet?—Is there much time left?' And, addressing the padre, he added, speaking slowly—'Would you tell me what time it is? . . . '
The padre drew out his watch and held it up for the prisoner to see. 'Twenty minutes to five o'clock', he said.
Di Giovanni answered, 'Thanks' . . .
The scene which I have just described plunged me into an intense emotion unknown to me. I have seen the greatest foreign tragedians in the most marvellous roles. Neither Zaconne, nor Grasso, nor Borras made as great an impression on me as the scene being played out before my eyes. And the reason is that I knew that this was real, a tragic reality. I was witnessing a man going to meet his fate. The fate of a man who had a debt to pay to society. As I did not want to miss a single detail I had to make an effort to control my emotions.
Soon a soldier arrived, bearing an instruction. The warders made ready. The cell door opened and Di Giovanni sighed with relief and said: 'Ah! . . . We're ready then? '

the Baron De Marchi, the son-in-law of General Roca; he was keen to engage Di Giovanni in conversation in order . . . "to see what sort of fellow he is."

When the prison governor Alberto Vinas, brought the good baron face to face with the condemned man and told the latter that his visitor was none other than the Baron De Marchi, Di Giovanni looked at him and asked, "You are a noble man?" "Yes," the baron answered, delighted. "Then stop annoying me", the anarchist returned, and turned his back on him.

After that Di Giovanni firmly refused three attempts by two priests who wanted to speak with him. At this point, the blacksmith arrived to rivet the bar of iron to each of his ankles.

All of the newspaper accounts of Di Giovanni's last moments are much of a piece. We shall reproduce the *Crítica* account because it contains, perhaps, more details than any other:

We started to tramp down that corridor, roughly 25 yards long. The convicted man strode boldly forward, so that we were obliged to quicken our steps. As we reached the other end, the sergeant said to him . . .

'One moment. Halt.'

The convicted man sat down. The blacksmith arrived with the shackles for his feet. The rivets made a mournful noise as they were driven home. Then they placed a rope between his manacled hands. Di Giovanni asked:

'What's that for?'

'To help you move.'

He turned and asked the trooper,

'Is it time. Are we ready yet? '

'One moment. We have to await the order.'

The man awaiting death stood there silently. He looked to left and to right and bowed his head to examine the bar which bound his feet together. And then he said,

'Would you be so kind as to have them bring me a little cup of coffee?'

The sergeant instructed the trooper that the convicted man should get his coffee. And the prisoner turned to the trooper and said, 'Make sure it's sweet, eh?'

After a slight delay they brought him a cup: he took it between his handcuffed hands and lifted it to his lips. Not the trace of a tremor in those hands. He sipped it. Shook his head and, somewhat annoyed, said, 'Caramba! Sweet, I said. It's a little on the bitter side . . . I like my coffee very sweet.' Four gulps disposed of the beverage. He wiped his mouth on his neckerchief and said a word of thanks.

Five minutes to go. The condemned man stood up and made to take one large step, quite forgetting that his feet were shackled. He stumbled. But, regaining his balance almost immediately, he explained, 'Of course . . . this won't let me.'

He had to climb three steps, but the shackles made that impossible. The sergeant ordered:

'Fetch a chair.'

But Di Giovanni refused this, saying,

'No . . . what chair! All I need is a little help.'

Afterwards, well, you know what happened. I went through agonies during that tragic ceremony. It was a pungent emotion I had never experienced before. And that because this was no entertainment, no fiction. This was reality that I was seeing . . . '

"Two men in uniform walked along the corridor, carrying heavy fetters and the equipment required to rivet them on. Inside the cell, the scene was one of awful drama. Men fitted the shackles to Di Giovanni's ankles and for a time the only sound was of hammer blows, until the condemned man was almost completely obstructed from moving at all. The troopers began to load their guns. With apparent calm, the warders placed the bench in the courtyard and paced out the five steps to where the firing squad would take up its position. As Di Giovanni set out for the place of execution, the rattle of his chains dragging on the ground could be heard in the distance. Everyone maintained a stony silence, broken only by the barked orders of the officer who was to direct the execution."

Meanwhile, the prison yard was a strange sight to behold— knots of people clustered together in its narrow confines, determined not to miss a single detail of what came next. The roof of the carpentry shop (which had a perfect view of the yard) was similarly crowded. Outside, some thousands of people waited for the privilege of hearing the deadly volley from within.

Back to the newspaper account:

". . . At the back of the yard is a high wall on the upper part of which the guard posts are located. Stretching up to the 50 metre mark before one comes to that wall is a sort of grassy mound a metre in height; it slopes away gently towards the pathways opposite the carpentry shop. The death chair had been positioned atop this grass mound, at a distance of roughly 3 metres from the wall.

"By then—5am it was—first light was beginning to filter through. A diffused light covered everything in a mantle of grey. The death chair was in position on the highest section of the grassy slope. Even from a distance one could see the exaggeratedly high back and feet of the chair, which appeared to be thrust so firmly into the ground.

"The marching feet of the troopers made heads turn. This was the detail of warders chosen to carry out the sentence. The soldiers spread out until they formed a square around the spot where the chair had been set up. The words of command (the only voices which rent the early morning stillness) seemed somehow out of place, as they echoed through the air.

"Surrounded by several warders, Di Giovanni stood inside the workshop, an open-sided shed facing on to the wall opposite. To spare the condemned man any premature glimpse of the place of execution a canopy shut off the shed, like the stage-front curtains of some grotesque theatre. From time to time some of the prisoner's escort would lift a corner of the canopy to check the progress of the preparations. Beneath the hanging canvas one could just make out Severino Di Giovanni's feet shackled by a bar of iron. One crisp order from the secretary to the military tribunal and the condemned man was brought into his presence. Military officers lined one third of the distance between the door through which

the condemned man would pass and the death chair in the distance. The ceremony was under way.

"During the hours of waiting, Di Giovanni seems to have regained the famous composure which forever characterised him. He emerged from beneath the canopy, shuffling slowly forward. He was wearing a brand-new mechanic's overall. The bonds which thrust his feet apart kept his steps extremely short. A rope connecting the fetters and his handcuffs made it easier for him to walk. He carried his hands crossed before him.

"He was brought before the secretary to the tribunal. Standing in front of this army officer he adopted the attitude of indifference which he had displayed the morning before as the tribunal's verdict was read out to him. Except that this time he was scarcely able to overcome the excitement, the intense excitement coursing through his veins. One got the impression that he had walked league upon league to reach that spot, to halt suddenly with a great effort, lest he betray exhaustion.

"He carried his head high as if eager to gulp in all of the air around him. His chin jutted forward in token of his resolution. His features were set and he was sweating profusely. His eyes were fixed, not upon the secretary, as they had been the morning before, but on the fragment of starry skies visible above the prison searchlights.

"The sentence of the tribunal was read out again . . . at greater length this time, although the document was the same one as before. As he listened or mused on who knows what thoughts, his tongue licked constantly at drying lips. His lips twitched nervously. He seemed on the verge of saying something but fought the temptation. He listened in silence as the sentence was read.

" 'Permit me to say something', he said unexpectedly.

" 'You may not speak. Continue,' was the answer of the startled officer.

"He shuffled forward. When he reached the edge of the grass verge atop which the death chair had been placed, he required the aid of two prison officials to clear the edge. His first two steps availed him little for he skidded on moist, soft grass on the hillock. Then he made it up thanks to a few small hops, the spectacle of which seemed merely to underline the tragedy of the scene.

"The two officials gripped him tightly by the arm and took his weight to save him from falling. Somewhat brusquely, he shrugged off the officials who were assisting him, and covered the distance to the death chair without aid from anyone. Then, slowly, almost unconcernedly, he settled into it. He leaned strongly against its high back as if, to test the comfort of the chair. And then he sat, blithely watching the preparations, his body in a relaxed position, leaning slightly forward.

"When the firing squad marched in, he looked long and hard at every one of them.

"Once the prisoner was seated and the firing squad had assumed its position facing him, one soldier approached him, carrying a blindfold. He came up behind Di Giovanni. He placed the blindfold before the prisoner's eyes but the latter said:

" 'I don't want to be blindfolded' ".

"But when the trooper insisted, he jerked his head back. Then the trooper withdrew, after having tied him to the chair with a rope crisscrossing his chest.

"When the squad was ready to fire and the sergeant gestured the order to shoot, Di Giovanni stiffened against the back of the chair. He raised his head. All of his muscles tensed and then, lifting his body insofar as he was able he poured all of his being into one cry. And so the silence of that moment was broken by a shrill cry rising from his throat . . .

" 'Long live Anarchy!'

"Seconds later, the commander of the firing squad lowered his sword and eight bullets ripped through Di Giovanni's body. A whiff of smoke rising from his chest signalled the entry points. His face contracted in a violent grimace of pain. Muscular contractions raised him a little out of the chair only to have him collapse heavily over to the left side.

"Splinters of wood showered from the chair back. A huge bloodstain saturated the chair, dripping down on to the ground.

"Right after Di Giovanni's body slumped back in the chair the officer in charge fired the coup de grace . . . a bullet which entered the body through the right temple."

Paulino Scarfó met the same death as his leader and mentor. His family tried to persuade him to petition for clemency, but his answer to that was . . . "An anarchist never asks for clemency". Nor was he willing to receive his mother—who had spent a painful twenty-four hours waiting to see the president to ask him to spare her son—because, he maintained, it would only add to her suffering if she were able to see him once more. "Better that she should remember me as she knew me before. It would only add to her grief and I have made her suffer enough in this life as it is." Through Josefina, he sent his greetings to . . . "all the comrades who remained to struggle". Scarfó's execution was bereft of theatrical touches. This time no one was permitted to view the prisoner, except for the prison officials who had to finalise arrangements.

Sitting on the death chair, Scarfó also rejected a blind-fold. Then, when the time came, he said to those present:

"Good night, gentlemen."

And when he heard the order to take aim he cried out:

"Long live Anarchy!"

A reporter from *Crítica* gave this description of the scene outside the prison: "At 5am the volley rang out; it was not like yesterday's which did not come all at once; the coup de grace was heard two seconds later. Thereafter the screaming[22] which chilled the hearts of all present and made even the bravest quiver. All that screaming, carried on the breeze, was louder than that which went up the night before. Voices in more cells joined in the chorus.

"Then, the ensuing silence was broken by the clatter of a tram coming from far away to pass by the prison. The crowd dispersed and we saw for the first time that there were thousands present.

"Lots of cars streamed by: one, sleek and yellow, contained three women, unescorted. The one at the wheel said to her girlfriends: 'I think the howl that went up today was more impressive, don't you' . . . "

Di Giovanni's corpse—like Paulino Scarfó's—was not released to relatives. Instead, on the orders of the minister, Matias Sanchez Sorondo, it was taken to La Chacarita cemetery under impressive police escort; no announcement was made to anyone about its destination or when it would be moved. Although the burial took place at dawn and no one was able to witness it (excepting the police and prison warders of the escort), Severino Di Giovanni's tomb was, next day, covered with red flowers.

At this, Sanchez Sorondo was outraged and ordered that the Prefecture of Police post "a permanent guard, around the clock, on the burial place which holds the remains of Severino Di Giovanni . . . until such time as those remains are removed to another grave or their cremation has been completed". Furthermore, it was arranged that police would cordon off the cemetry to forestall demonstrations or incidents of the sort.

Tacitly, the government was admitting that this man had been more than just an ordinary criminal.

Afterwards, as always, things subsided into their natural, normal course. No one was to be bold enough to write a single word in defence of the two shot men. The repression was violent and nobody dared make himself a target for it. Sanchez Sorondo gave orders that the police should wipe out the remnants of Di Giovanni's group. Thus, one by one, their numbers were reduced. Nutti Malvicini, 'captain' Paz and the rest, almost to a man. With their leader dead, the group came apart. Only one man tried to follow in the footsteps of Severino Di Giovanni and despite the persecution kept faith doggedly with the ideals of his leader; this was the Chilean Jorge Tamayo Gavilan. But he was a man of very confused ideas. His only virtue was his boundless courage. Having moved to Argentina along

[22] *All of the prison's inmates who had been awaiting the report of the volley sent up a chorus of screams and beat their prison bars frantically.*

with the greatest Chilean anarchist leader, Pedro Ortuzar, he was in the vanguard of all the most dangerous missions undertaken by Argentinian anarchism . . . he could be found on strike pickets, at meetings, distributing leaflets in the Plaza de Mayo, etc. Won over by Di Giovanni, he acted as his lieutenant on the riskiest operations. Uneducated and having none of the theoretical grounding of a Di Giovanni, there was only one thing left to Tamayo . . . violence. Without quite understanding the intent behind his 'anarchist expropriation', once Severino was dead, Tamayo carried out two daring raids although he knew that the police were already on his trail. In the latter raid at Villalonga, he was surrounded by police but shot his way out of the trap after a prolonged gunbattle in the course of which he killed three policemen. That sealed his fate. Now the police were after him solely in order to avenge their dead colleagues. In addition, he was accused of responsibility for the death of Major Rosasco, the police chief of Buenos Aires province, murdered by anarchists in a restaurant in Avellaneda while dining there. Tamayo was eventually betrayed by a woman, Elsa Eisen de Salmstein (a girlfriend of Tamayo's fiancee, Ester Rosa Kornovska) who gave police his address.

Tamayo Gavilan met his death on July 22 1931. As to how he did so, opinions differ. Anarchists were to claim that he was murdered in his sleep. In a communique, the police were to claim that they had discovered him by accident and that, while effecting a search of a hotel in Sarandi Street, they burst into a room to come face to face with Tamayo Gavilan who opened fire on them and had to be killed.

The fact remains that Tamayo Gavilan's corpse bore only one bullet wound . . . in the back of the head.

In the United States, the Italian anarchists were to publish a special edition of their paper, *L'Adunata dei Refrattari*, devoted to Severino Di Giovanni and Paulino Scarfó, only a few days after the executions. The first page was occupied by a requiem poem (of high literary value) . . . entitled *Viva L'Anarchia*, from the pen of the poetess Virgilia D'Andrea. The contents, profusely illustrated with photographs of the anarchist pair, were a biographical sketch of them plus an account of their exploits in a lengthy article some seven pages long, entitled "The Tragedy of Buenos Aires".

Months passed and on May 13 1932, press freedoms were restored in Argentina. *La Antorcha* carried an article entitled, "Two ways to die: the anarchist and the dictator", wherein comparisons were made between the death of the former president Uriburu (recently deceased in Paris) and that of Severino Di Giovanni.

The author wrote:

"We are in Paris, by the portals of the Church of Saint Pierre de Chaillot. The religious rites have ended: the former dictator's remains are resting in the crypt.

Crowds surround the group of mourners whose crepe armbands testify to their being related to the deceased. The official delegation files by . . . the frock coats, military dress uniforms, the highly elegant coiffure of the ladies of the nobility and aristocracy . . . Men and women weep openly. In the arms of a woman friend, Dona Aurelio Madero de Uriburu is sobbing. It is an emotional scene, carefully recorded by reporters from the news agencies which supply the great publications of Buenos Aires with rivers of words. Photographers and cameramen are making the photographs and newsreels which the newspaper firms would offer the moon for in their eagerness to offer the Argentinian reader the most touching scenes. The requiem is over. On top of the bier, is a gold plate reading "To Lieutenant General of the Argentine Army, D. José Felix Uriburu, from the government of the French Republic".

Now we are in Buenos Aires, by a graveside along the main roadway through La Chacarita cemetry. Today is the 46^{th} anniversary of the Chicago massacre. Standing before the grave in which the corpse of Severino Di Giovanni was dumped, a mixed group of anarchist men and women are loud in their denunciations of the great crimes of capitalism and its tyrannies. The police are watching from a distance, concealed among the trees and crosses, weapons at the ready to bring the commemoration to a close. There are no reporters present. Buenos Aires' great newspapers will not waste as much as a single gramme of lead on such pettiness. Consequently there are no photographers in attendance here. And no crepe armbands to be seen. And no one sobs here. Josefina América Scarfó—she is here, at the foot of the makeshift rostrum—wearing a suit of brown cloth: her face is slightly flushed and her eyes glint a curious sort of light.

The humble resting place, whose only decoration is of gravel, is topped by a block of marble which may have been rescued from some grave erased by the weather. On the marble is scratched, in pencil, "To Severino Di Giovanni, from your admirers".

One was a soldier; the other was an anarchist. The former was a tyrant which is to say an oppressor of peoples; the latter was a libertarian, which is to say, a fighter for human freedom. One lived only to place himself at the service of the present society and to make harsher still and heavier the chains dragged by the humble classes; the other lived only to place himself at the service of that social force which is aimed at the destruction of the society of today and the breaking of all chains.

Uriburu died a civilian, without pain and glory, in a coma which avoided him a face to face meeting with his death. Di Giovanni died—such irony!—in the manner of certain glorious generals, looking straight into the face of death, straight into its eyes as he cried that manly cry which made even death itself tremble, because

those who witnessed his murder say that the very rifle barrels shuddered. The hearts and pulses of the fratricidal soldiery jolted!

The tyrant-soldier went to his death with the wife who stood by his side during the sinister days of his dictatorship, kneeling at his right hand, consumed by grief. The anarchist strode towards his death with the serenest of kisses from his companion on his brow . . . this companion who eased his waiting with the finest anodyne for sadness . . . a light-filled glance.

Uriburu died with a thermometre clasped under his arm, in a hospital ward. Di Giovanni went to his death with a smile on his lips.

On the morrow, the former would have a monument before which the very people whom he oppressed would file past. Di Giovanni was to have something in the hearts of anarchists which is worth all of the marble of Carrara . . . a feeling of gratitude and solidarity because, while he may have fought contrary to the counsel of many, resorting to personal methods of a dubious sort, HE KNEW HOW TO DIE THE DEATH WE SHOULD ALL LIKE FOR OURSELVES."

In its first issue, published after the lifting of the ban imposed by Uriburu—on February 5 1932, *Crítica* reported that Lieutenant Franco had returned from his exile in Paraguay. *Crítica* used that opportunity to apologise to its readership for its reportage of the deaths of Di Giovanni and Paulino Scarfó. The paper pointed out that it had been subjected to government pressure in much the same way that Lieutenant Franco had had to contend with government pressure in his preparations for the defence. It also denounced the fact that both Di Giovanni and Scarfó had been subjected to atrocious torture after they had been sentenced to death, in an attempt to extract confessions of guilt concerning many crimes. Years later, this denunciation was to be borne out by the crime correspondent Gustavo Gonzalez (the doyen of journalists at the Central Police Department) who had been present when Di Giovanni was shot by the firing squad[23].

---

[23] As we have said, the prison governor was Dr Alberto Vinas, who had been appointed to that position by Uriburu. A conservative deputy, he was one of the most active people in the overthrow of Yrigoyen. He was an implacable enemy of anarchism and author of draft legislation (in 1927) to introduce the death penalty to Argentina. On January 6 1928 he starred in the minor 'Maipu Pigall' scandal involving well to do young thugs. The police arrested, for drunkenness, not only national deputy Alberto Vinas, a 37 year old Argentinian, but also David Tezanos Pintos (47); Ricardo Zuberbuhler, (26), an Argentinian stock-holder; and student Rodolfo Ramon Otero.
Naturally, *La Protesta* seized the opportunity thus presented and carried an item which said, 'Deputy Vinas now has convincing evidence to back up his plan to introduce capital punishment; crime is on the increase, even among decent folk.'
From prison governor, Vinas turned to a career in diplomacy. We find him many years later back in Buenos Aires. In one of the many swoops carried out under Peron, Vinas was arrested along with other opposition leaders (Radicals, conservatives, socialists, anarchists—Diego Abad de Santillán among the latter) and taken as a prisoner to the penitentiary whose governor he had once been.

Crítica which had been Uriburu's trustiest ally in assisting his victory on September 6 1930 and which had described Di Giovanni as a criminal from the moment of his arrest, pointed out (on February 5 1932) after criticising the spectacle of deaths by firing squad, "Let it be said, as a matter of justice, that, just as there was a section of the population who did not lose sight of their moral judgement at that time, so too, there were two hearts, two faces on whom the whole criminal organisation of the dictatorship foundered . . . the two miscreants Di Giovanni and Scarfó who served as puppets in the bloody farce and who saved human dignity in the moment they died. What glorious examples of serenity and steadfastness and love of the Ideal were offered by both condemned men in the closing stages of their lives! Badgered by jailers, reporters, magistrates, aristocrats and priests, subjected to barbarous torture which left ghastly wounds upon their bodies, and taunted by the sneers and jibes that sought to destroy their unalterable serenity. They were obliged to debate abstruse philosophical issues and reply to pointless and banal questioning and invited to indulge in a little of life's pleasures even as the firing squad which would dispatch them was being pointed out to them; even then, with their positions forever oscillating, neither man ceased to be what he was. Indeed, they were that now more than ever and for that they died. They surpassed themselves, and—becoming more than men, for men as such need not endure so much—they have become a banner for a persecuted ideal, and went to their deaths voicing that supreme cry which will resound for a long, long time."

We can say that Di Giovanni's death closed the book on the so-called 'anarchist expropriators' in Argentina and indeed, on anarchism of the sort which employed violence in pursuit of its ideals. In this respect Diego Abad de Santillán's prediction was to be borne out . . . when this anarchism of violence failed, the people at large would see libertarians as synonymous with irascible bomb throwers and soulless bandits. It would spell the end of anarchism in Argentina. Because, from the 1930s onwards, the libertarian ideal was gradually to dwindle into something which withdrew into intellectual conclaves and the odd syndicate here and there, the majority of whose members would be foreign-born. This was so much the case that, in order to destroy *La Protesta* as a viable daily paper, president Agustin Justo had merely to remove its arrangements for franking its copies for postage.

But it was in Spain that the seal was to be set on this decline. The majority of Argentinian anarchists went there to risk their lives. And to be destroyed, decimated and shot by communists and Francoists alike. Men of unbelievable purity and naivety, all that would survive of them would be a handful of groups

---

There, the other political detainees refused all contact with him and sent him to Coventry, 'because of his reputation as a torturer.'

for whom there was nothing left except to retreat into their memories and, maybe, into their hopes.

At this point we should mention the theoretician (Di Giovanni was a fine practitioner of his theories) by the name of Aldo Aguzzi. After the Spanish Civil War, this supremely sensitive, introverted Italian returned to Argentina overwhelmed by disillusionment and sadness. Family problems were the factor that tipped the balance and impelled him to seek a solution in suicide.

Another incredible personality who appeared on the scene when the tragedy of Di Giovanni was being played out and who defied everybody by assuming his defence is Lieutenant Juan Carlos Franco. A defender against everybody and everything. Flying in the face of the instructions of the nation's president, of instructions from the Army, of military discipline, risking his future career. In January 1931 he assumed the defence of public enemy number one no less. A minor lieutenant in the cyclists' and archivists' corps, he dared to ignore orders from the Minister of War, General Francisco Medina himself, and from Colonel Nicolas Accame, the officer commanding the 1st Division. He acted in defiance of the scandalised expressions of officials like the Minister of the Interior himself, Matias Sanchez Sorondo and such exalted personages as the State prosecutor, Luis Roque Gondra (who was later to vomit at Di Giovanni's execution and exit from the prison, pale and trembling).

It was incredible: the case for the defence, as argued by first Lieutenant Franco, seemed to sprout out of this climate of fear as if by spontaneous generation. Some were to allege later that this speech had been written by Alfredo Palacios or Lopez Lecube. But the fact is that it was Franco who stuck his neck out and Franco who would have to pay for that.

Four days after his defence plea on Di Giovanni's behalf, he was dismissed from the service by order of the president and—now a civilian—was imprisoned like a common criminal in the national penitentiary. The plan was to move him to Ushuaia, but Uriburu (as we mentioned earlier) softened in the end, on condition that Franco leave the country. So in March 1931, Franco left Argentina for Asuncion, Paraguay where he lived off his journalistic activities. In October 1932 (by which time Justo was president of Argentina) Franco was pardoned and thus was able to return from exile. He was recommissioned into the army with his old rank, without loss of seniority except for the months after he had been demobilised. He was appointed to some obscure position in Jujuy. There his chief pastime was the composition of folk dramas, some of which are still performed today. But he did not long survive his return and died on February 3 1934 (he was only thirty-five years old) of an infectious fever.

It only remains for us to say a few words about those who out-lived Di Giovanni and who belonged to his group. We should not be lying if we were to say that everything was laid to rest along with Severino Di Giovanni. The others are of no real stature on their own. Some were hunted down and killed by the police or went to their deaths in Spain; others simply called a halt and, deeply disillusioned with life, wanted nothing more to do with ideals.

Alejandro Scarfó served over three and a half years in prison but left it a deeply embittered man. While he was inside, his girlfriend, Elena Serra had married another. For Alejandro—scarcely more than a teenager—this was such a heavy blow that he never completely got over it. A profound bitterness marked his life thereafter. With slight success only, he tried his hand at intellectual anarchism but gradually immersed himself totally in ordinary life.

América Josefina Scarfó deserves a separate mention. The loss of Di Giovanni was too severe a blow for her and devastated her. For her, February 1931 was the month when she lost her great love, the intoxicating man who initiated her to passion, ideas, in short to life in the full: and the month when she also witnessed the end of her dearest brother, Paulino. At the age of just seventeen, Josefina was bereft of the tremendously strong personality of her Severino Di Giovanni. Alone, now, without his strength to lean upon she had to face a hostile world and get used to ordinary, everyday life with ordinary, everyday men and women. And she compromised. There is no way of knowing whether she was deliberately carrying out Di Giovanni's own recommendation to her or whether it just worked out that way. He had urged her to marry a comrade and to devote herself to propagating their ideals, but not in the line of attack. América Josefina married a man who was close to the libertarian groups. Years later, with the help and advice of anarchist intellectuals and of Ramon Prieto she set up a publishing house which (in addition to a range of general titles) put out a collection of the works of anarchist thinkers.

After some years Teresina Di Giovanni remarried. She wed a man who had once shared the same ideals as Severino. Severino's son, Ilvo, was for many years a journalist and today is a prosperous poultry breeder. Poultry breeding was, of course, an interest his father shared.

La Antorcha remained loyal to the memory of Severino Di Giovanni and Paulino Scarfó and on the anniversaries of their executions and on May Days, they honoured the fallen pair whose names (it reported) were cheered at meetings by anarchist workers. But as the Italian anarchist organizations slowly dwindled and faded, the memory of those names faded too.

Thus a shadowy oblivion enveloped them all (up to a few years ago, the only man capable of recalling Di Giovanni's actions on behalf of the campaign for Sacco and Vanzetti, was Alberto S. Bianchi, who gave a lecture full of nostalgia for those years of struggle) until the opposite became the case. The figure of Severino

Di Giovanni came to be a necessary cliche in the arsenals of bored and repetitive journalists. Whenever some great hold-up occurs and creates the occasion for a history of crime in Argentina, one can be sure that Di Giovanni will inevitably turn up in the catalogue of famous gunmen. And no one tries to correct this image, for it is accepted as the truth. Apparently "the man in black" is doomed to bear forever the tired old cliched descriptions of police reports.

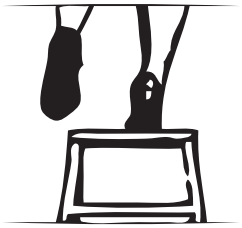
We stated at the outset that when the present writer began his research into this man (a man so fiercely opposed by so many, so believed of a few, a man so hard to classify) it was his belief that he should have to see Di Giovanni as a man without scruples, morals or ideals, with all of the demerits of a common thug, albeit an outstanding one. That is, we expected him to emerge as nothing other than a gangster with style.

But it has not turned out like that. Examination of documents, witnesses' testimony and newspaper reports and exhaustive discussions with those who knew him and a thoroughly non-partisan approach to our subject has destroyed many of the myths surrounding the figure of Severino Di Giovanni.

It would be stupid to attempt the rehabilitation of a figure described as a common thug merely in order to create a sensation.

But Di Giovanni was no common criminal. He was not—even though the occasional journalist may repeat the charge in the crime pages today—an underworld figure. And readers should take this one detail to heart; Di Giovanni was captured as he emerged, not from some casino, nightclub, whorehouse, or fashionable health resort, but from a printing works. Throughout his four years on the run there was never any police order given to look for him in any of the usual haunts of common criminals. He did not steal, kill or perpetrate offences for personal gain or to enjoy the good life of someone who turns to crime to avoid working or to get a taste of power.

Di Giovanni was an ill-starred hero, a young man who took seriously everything which the texts of his ideology told him. That ideology, as he interpreted it can shift from goodness and respect for human life in every circumstance, to the most desperate and violent action explained away by an ideal that seeks to secure absolute liberty for all.



Osvaldo Bayer
Anarchism and Violence
Severino Di Giovanni in Argentina 1923–1931

Osvaldo Bayer *Severino Di Giovanni, el idealista de la violencia.* Buenos Aires, Ed Galerna, 1970
Translated by Paul Sharkey.
1st English Edition 1985. Co-edition Elephant Editions & Refract Publications
Reprinted by Elephant Editions, London 2013.
Retrieved on October 10, 2010 from **digitalelephant.blogspot.com**